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A LOST CAUSE.



A LOST CAUSE

*A STORY OF THE LAST REBELLION IN
POLAND*

BY

W. W. ALDRED

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LONDON

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

SOME words of explanation seem almost necessary at the commencement of the story which is embodied in the accompanying pages.

In the first place the date must be clearly defined. The story opens in June, 1862, and concludes in the autumn of the following year.

It will be recollected that the chief event of the first year—at least so far as our own country was concerned—was the International Exhibition held in London.

In the beginning of the following year occurred the insurrection in Poland, an event in which most of the personages in this story are, more or less, concerned.

Thus far, then, the following tale is a true

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and historical one ; but, as to the rest, as to the persons and the various incidents described in these pages, the same quality of truth cannot be claimed.

It would be repeating a somewhat trite verity to say that *fiction* is always founded, more or less, on *fact*.

In the most fanciful of romances there is some reality ; the wildest legends contain some admixture of truth.

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A LOST CAUSE :

A Story of the Last Rebellion in Poland.

CHAPTER I.

A BALL OF THE SEASON.

A HUNDRED carriages line each side of Park Lane; the number for the last half-hour has not perceptibly lessened.

A dozen or so of policemen stand at different points to regulate the constant stream of vehicles—vehicles of every description, and of every rank in society; here a barouche, followed by a four-wheeled cab, drawn by a wearied horse; there a respectable brougham, and farther on a dashing hansom (private), its owner lazily impatient of his delayed arrival at the dazzlingly lighted doorway.

The last sleepy omnibus of the night moves between the rows of carriages even more sleepily

and slow, that its driver and his companions on the box seat may have a good look at the scene beside them—at the great block of light standing out in the darkness, and the fairy-like forms (as seen from a distance) that flit through the porch.

The occupants, festive but plebeian, of a passing hansom lean over the foot-board to gaze and conjecture who is the giver of the ball, and who are the guests that arrive, while they criticize the whole proceedings, then listen for a moment to catch the strains of music which are to be heard during a temporary lull in the shouting of policemen and coachmen and footmen.

For the night is perfectly still and quiet, the air is sultry, the sky is completely overcast with clouds, and ever and anon a flash of lightning reveals the trees in the park and the shape of the clouds in the sky, and sometimes distant thunder is heard, so distant and low that it sounds like the moaning of nature in pain and weariness. Besides, that elephantine monster, London, has finished its day's work; its sober business has long since been done; its work-a-day pleasures are just ended; its theatres and music-halls are now all dark and dismal, and from them creep the wearied actors and actresses

after their work on the boards, to rest, if it be possible, their heavy limbs and soothe in sleep their aching heads.

The opera itself is shutting up; many of these carriages have fought their way out of the tohue-bohue, in Bow Street or the Haymarket; the last roll of the drum has been heard for that night, and the voice of the *prima donna* has died away.

The pleasures of the day are done, but the sleepless monster, like to some "secret black and midnight hag" now carries on the hideous deeds of night. The pent-up desires of the day are now to be let loose, the craven wickedness of people who have not sufficient audacity to carry out their plans before all the world in the light of day, has now its opportunity.

No one will know anything about it if you are only clever and cautious. Of course the product of your vice and crime will be revealed sooner or later; nothing is completely hidden in this world, but there is no newspaper correspondent sharp enough to find out the whole story, there is no detective so acute that he can trace the evil to its original source. I assure you that that unfortunate saying—

"Woe to him by whom the evil cometh" is, like many other proverbs, not borne out by

facts. So make haste, O timidly wicked one; you have only three or four hours before you, and then the dawn will arise, and you, like some stealthy ravenous wolf, his appetite only half satiated, will have to creep away to your lair—and put on sheep's clothing.

But the line of carriages has become much shorter, there are only some dozen guests left outside, so let us put on our Gyges' ring and, invisible, glide under the porch.

At this moment a splendid bay horse, which has been fretting and fuming at the tedious delays and stoppages, and whose bit is lathered with foam, has drawn his carriage, a light coupé, up the drive to the porch, a white-gloved hand is impetuously thrust through the carriage window to open the door, and all that the footman in attendance can do is to hold the door open while the fair lady springs down on the soft Brussels carpet on the steps and under the porch. What a splendid woman! She must be six feet in height! and her dress! She turns her head swiftly towards the coachman so that you can see her black hair, which absolutely glitters in the light, so soft, so lustrous is it—and only decked with one damask rose.

“Come back at two punctually,” she says,

then turns, the white satin train of her dress rustling as she turns, trips up the steps and walks through the porch into the hall.

I vote we follow her. Ah, she has turned into the cloak room (the dining-room of the house); there goes the black hair and damask rose, visible above the heads of the crowd. For here the struggle begins, at the foot of a broad marble staircase with tropical plants on each side whose broad leaves droop over the fighting crowd on the steps, touching the heads of the taller warriors. The assaulting party is composed on our left of people coming from the cloak room, on the right of fresh forces returning from sundry refreshment rooms, while the enemy's forces with the advantage of ground have to fight against our side already flushed with—victory.

Let us devoutly hope that the Jacob's ladder of the future will not be this sort of thing. Surely heaven will not be so over-crowded: quite the contrary, one would imagine, if the "camel question," as Heine puts it, is the test of the examination. Not that there is any resemblance to one's preconceived ideas of the aforesaid ladder in the staircase before us; the most ardent stretch of youthful imagination could not transform the struggling beings—fat, purple-

faced, with bloodshot eyes, scolding, pushing, hustling, and sweating—into angels of light. If this is pleasure and enjoyment, what then is the definition of pain and discomfort?

Here is the dark-haired lady again, leading on a fresh attack from the cloak room.

“οἷος δ’ ἔκ νεφέων ἀναφάνεται οὐλῖος ἀστὴρ,
παμφαινων, τοτὲ δ’ αὖτις ἔδν νεφεα σκιάοντα.”

She forces a passage up the stairs, while the crowd seems to make way for her. It must be her eyes and the haughty curve upwards of her red lips that make the people fear her and yield her a passage. The men stare at her and give way at once, they try and stop to look at her as she passes, and get very much hustled in consequence; the women yield reluctantly, and so she passes on, reaches the landing at the top, a garden of flowers and plants, and passes through the archway of flowers into the ball-room. Through the entrance one sees a long vista of rooms, a very avenue of rooms, hung with festoons of evergreens and flowers arching overhead, and each room is entered through an archway of flowers, roses and honeysuckle and jasmine. Through the archway there meets you, *en plein visage*, a blast of hot air like the breath of a blasting furnace, an air filled with the most diverse scents, so that you might fancy

you were entering into some fetid and fever-stricken atmosphere.

The ball rooms are lighted with the intense light of huge chandeliers and hundreds of wax candles. And the inhabitants of this glaring and dazzling place! a constantly moving, jostling mass of human beings dressed in every conceivable bright colour, save where a black figure appears from out the mass of crinolines of silk and satin and tulle and tarlatan.

The centre of this sort of pandemonium is a dizzy whirlpool of men and women; you can distinguish the head of some tall American, perhaps, or a great guardsman, like corks in a swirl of water gyrating round and round in a wide circle. And above the hubbub of voices and occasional shrill laughter you hear the sounds of the violins and cornet playing one of Strauss' or Godfrey's sad and passionate waltzes.

No one seems to be regarding the music; all are perfectly indifferent to it, and are intent on keeping on their feet in the hustling crowd, or making their way from one place to another.

There is no scene to which we can liken this in heaven or earth or the place under the earth. Shall we mix with the crowd and fight our way through it? or had we not better, while there is

yet time, turn back into the dark night? But we must follow that dark lady, and—by Heaven! she has disappeared while we were delaying at the entrance, so in we go.

Now who does the sagacious reader suppose was the person who had created this little world and set it agog in this mad way? A prince of the blood royal? A peer of the realm? Perhaps a Minister of State? No, the little god was neither of these powers that be; he was a German Jew, who in the space of ten years or so had amassed a few millions of money. With an infinitesimal fraction of his riches he had purchased the title of Baron of one of those little German parodies of a State which the ruthless Prussian has since demolished, or rather swallowed whole. By courtesy he is therefore styled Baron Rosencranz, though by the law of the land he is simply plain Mr. Rosencranz, of No 1, Cherubim Court, City, and of Mecklenburg House, Park Lane, and of Ladywell, Bucks. Having revealed the name of our host, I need scarcely describe him further; every one knows his shining bald head and black hair, his little twinkling eyes, and face pale with fat.

The jolly little man, how generous—no, that is not the word—how munificent he is! how

sociable ! how nice to everybody—yes, even to his own clerks and servants.

They say he never swears at them or is even angry with them for any little fault or omission, unless of course he loses money by it, then the culprit is simply dismissed ; that is his rule.

He never spends a shilling without a cause, but then he is never sparing of money. This grand ball of his cost him £20,000. I know it, for the man who contracted for the execution of it told me. The contractor is a great friend of the Baron's, he banks with him, invests through him, and borrows loans from him for the execution of his works.

For the Baron is a jack of all trades and succeeds in all—banker, financier, stockbroker, director, merchant, bill-discounter, everything that a man of business can be. After all, this ball is a mere matter of finance.

On the debit side is, I say, £20,000 ; credit, £10,000, which he gains per annum from the said contractor ; item, about £100,000, which he adds to his income every year by his connection with the great people who come to his house. Balance, £90,000—not a bad piece of work for one night. For let me inform the innocent reader that whereas the Baron has made for the last few years an average of a quarter of a

million a-year, he would not get half that sum but for these grand entertainments. Watch him now as he stands at the far end of the ball-room, where is a conservatory built out temporarily into the garden with windows wide open to let in the comparatively cool air from outside. He stands mopping his face with his silk handkerchief, his diamond stud flashing in the blazing light, while he talks to that Russian general in evening dress decorated with a military order, a man with scanty iron grey hair, and heavy iron grey moustache. It is perhaps rather insolent to call him "that General," because he is none other than the well-known General Bagration (I will not give his real name, firstly, because it is nearly unpronounceable, and secondly, it would be rather personal).

He is well known, not only in his own country, but also in the cities of the west.

He is one of the enigmas of Europe, and probably only one or two men on the whole continent know with any accuracy what he really is—whether he is the vanguard of the Tsar's policy, the decoy bird of the Imperial Government, or whether he is the leader of secret rebels and secret societies, whose very existence is doubted, but whose influence is everywhere vaguely felt.

One thing only is known for certain—that he is an excellent officer, a man whose services it would be dangerous to dispense with. He is besides a model of the Russian soldier, patient and enduring. His sturdy frame has borne the extremes of cold and heat in the freezing darkness of the north, and the blazing day of Asiatic steppes. Also from the appearance of his physiognomy one may conjecture that he has no objection to neat brandy. Rather a terrible sort of person on the whole, and one cannot help feeling afraid for good-natured little Rosencranz *aux prises* with such an opponent. But they are very friendly together, and are in fact mutually giving information about the coming Russian Loan which is about to be launched.

“Then they have made proposals to you?” asks the General, speaking in French.

“Sounded me, sounded me, you know,” replies the banker smiling and mopping.

“And what did you say?”

“Well, I left it doubtful; I said I would think over it. Things are safe there, I suppose, eh?”

“H’m, don’t know.”

“A little queer—eh? So I have heard. Affairs are not settled in Poland, so they say. What do you think of it, General, now—hum? Would you advise the enterprise?”

At this question both men looked into each other's eyes, the bloodshot eyes of the general into the little black eyes of the banker. Then General Bagrathion frowned and seemed to be meditating on the question.

"Well," he said at last, "it is risky, still—you have not absolutely refused your co-operation?"

"No, not refused, but——"

"Well, do not refuse, wait a bit; see how things turn out."

"Yes, yes," repeated the Jew, "see how things turn out—just what I thought of doing. Look here," he added, with a good-humoured smile on his face, "if you'll go in, I'll go in for it—eh?"

"Very good, I have no objection," replied the General.

"As partners, eh, start you in business?—ha, ha!" laughed the Baron. Then putting his hand on the General's broad shoulder and standing on tiptoe, so that his mouth was nearly on a level with the other's ear, he murmured—"It will be a first-class investment if it can be done, for the original subscribers, eh?" with a chuckle. The General nodded.

"Five per cents at seventy-five," the banker murmured, "I and you and another man together could take them all up. Then——"

Here he was startled by a rich woman's voice saying "What horrible conspiracy are you two hatching together?"

General Bagrathion started and seemed confused, but Baron Rosencranz instantly quitted his companion and held out both his hands to the lady who had spoken, a beautiful woman with dark eyes and black hair ornamented with a damask rose.

"Ah, Madame de Woronzow, I am charmed! but you are late, very late."

"Where is the Baroness?" asked Madame de Woronzow, without explaining her tardy arrival.

"Mais je ne sais pas."

"What a nice husband you are! Go and see if you can find her; I want to compliment her on her grand entertainment."

"Ah, you like it?" said the Baron, grinning with pleasure.

"Very much, so go and find your spouse at once."

"Splendid ball, but why don't you get some system of ventilation invented, Rosencranz, to cool the place? At present it is not a bad preparation for the future; I know I have been feeling like Dives all the evening. Oh for a drop of water or something to cool my parched tongue!"

The speaker was a little man accompanying Madame de Woronzow; he was about a head shorter in stature than the lady, he had light hair, cut very close to his little head, and he had a big gummed moustache, and a little nose, and little blue eyes. But his chief characteristic was his boots, shining, shapely, and fitting like gloves round his ankles. This is the Hon. Frederick Augustus Fipps, third son of Viscount Fipps, who has some appointment in the Royal Household. The Hon. Mr. Fipps, or "Gus" Fipps as he is commonly called, is an attaché at the British Embassy in Paris, and he has just come to London to conclude a marriage with Miss Golding, younger daughter and joint heiress with her sister of Mr. Saul Golding, the banker.

Mr. Fipps is to be appointed to a responsible post, they say, at St. Petersburg as soon as he is married.

In the meantime a group had collected, or, to speak more precisely, had remained stationary round the host and his Lion and Lioness. For there was everywhere a crowd and every corner of the room was filled. And as they stood there amidst the rhododendrons and azaleas, and groups of rare ferns which ornamented the conservatory, scented with sweetbriar, the flare of the hundreds of lights was for a short second

deadened by a flash of lightning through the glass of the conservatory, and above the hoarse murmur of many voices and the music of the "flute, violin, bassoon" was heard a roll of thunder like the angry roar of an approaching lion. The ladies uttered exclamations of surprise and disgust at the prospect of having to pass through the storm. Gus remarked that they were safely imprisoned there for the next couple of hours, and advised people to make the best of their temporary incarceration.

But Madame de Woronzow said, "We shall have a bad storm; I should like to see it. Can one get out of any of these windows?" to Baron Rosencranz.

"No," he replied, "there is no balcony under these windows."

"One can get out of the *window*," suggested Gus, "but then it is a question of drop. A rope——"

"You are an *imbécile*!" said Madame, giving him a tap on his head with her fan. "I must see it," she added, with all the wilfulness of a beautiful woman. "Now, Rosencranz, invent the ways and means—quick!"

"The best place," meekly suggested Rosencranz, "would be on the terrace at the back of the house."

"How do you get to it?" she asked.

"Through the cloak room."

"What! shall I have to fight my way back to the stairs?" she said, looking down the long vista of rooms and the seething mass of men and women.

"Yes," replied the Baron with a grin.

"I will take you," suddenly said General Bagrathion, who had remained perfectly silent, dumb, as if he were shy and embarrassed. He now spoke with an air of resolution, as if he had made up his mind to something.

She turned quickly to him. "Bravo!" said she; "there is nothing like a soldier when you want anything *done*." She took his arm, she drew herself up in mock imitation of a soldier; she was superb so. "Lead on," she cried; "victory or death!"

The surrounding men looked at her admiringly; the General curled his moustache with his thumb and forefinger. Probably she had all along intended to carry off the General, so Gus apparently thought, for there was a tone of pique in the words as he said, "I wish you success in your campaign. Let us hope it will not be —— over again" (naming the place of one of General Bagrathion's quasi-defeats).

The General turned round his head with a

fierce scowl. Madame de Woronzow stopped, and, laughing a low mellow laugh, leant over to Gus with a graceful motion, developing the beautiful lines of her figure. Every movement of this woman gave her some fresh beauty, every turn of her head and every motion of her hand or arm—her arm rounded as a woman's should be, with faint dimples scarcely indicating the muscles or the nervous force in them, and with a skin soft and white by the side of bright colours, but warm-tinted, at the elbow a delicate pink, as it rested against her white dress. In repose she was a warm Ionian statue; moving she was an ever-changing variety of beauties, like some yacht appears on the summer sea, now scudding away from you, then showing her full length to you as her gunwale dips in the water, anon bearing straight towards you, one expanse of shining white, her bows rising and falling, kissed and embraced by the delighted waves.

She has whispered in the attaché's ear, and has chased the cloud from his face (a diplomatist is a fool to a woman), and now she is threading her way through the motley crowd ("motley's the only wear") on the arm of General Bagrathion. As she goes a chorus of admiration is raised by the group of men who had insensibly

been gathered round her. "She is incomparable, out-and-out the best thing here—She's the best ornament of my house," gallantly states Rosencranz. "And her husband!" suggests a practical man—"What rot!—it's a shame—I'll have one waltz out of her before she goes—'Pon my word she's"—"Fipps! Fipps!" said some one.

"Beware! Take care—

Trust her not. She is fooling thee!"

He laughed and went off, to look for his neglected fiancée.

Meanwhile the lightning flashed again and again, and the thunder rumbled, now loud and prolonged, now low. Madame de Woronzow and her companion made their way through the long room with little difficulty—the crowd gave way before them, a buzz of admiration followed her, and whispers named the famous Russian general. So they passed down the ball room, greeting acquaintances as they went, passed by the whirling dance, passed down the stairs under the exotic plants, and through the dining room into a morning room with a glass door which opened on to the terrace. Above them as they stood there, was the temporary room built out into the garden, whence they had just come. It

was one piece of light in the black darkness that surrounded them, save when a brilliant flash lit up the heavens and the earth.

"What news?" she asked, as soon as they were outside. "Why are you here? I heard to-night, quite accidentally, that you were in London and guessed I should find you here."

"I came about the loan," he replied. "It is regarded with disfavour in Paris, but I heard they were making strenuous exertions to obtain it in London. Rosencranz has just told me all about it. His co-operation has been asked, but he certainly will not give it yet, not till it's too late. He will not undertake it till I approve."

"I do not quite see the importance of the loan," Madame de Woronzow remarked.

"They must have the money, they want supplies and *matériel*. I am afraid they will obtain it; but, at least, one may be able to create an uneasy feeling about it. The fact of their wanting a loan may make people doubt whether a government which is continually borrowing can be so very secure. It is well in any case to lower their prestige as much as possible."

"I see, I see," she answered.

They spoke almost in a whisper. No wonder. It were well that the jasmine and the Virginia

creeper on the walls should not catch the words, lest they might utter some faint echo of them as their leaves moved in the midnight breeze.

There were men in yonder ball room who would have given half the remaining years of their lives to have caught two or three words of their conversation.

Our acquaintance Mr. Fipps, for instance; he would have been supplied with a clue to many things which were now incomprehensible enigmas to him.

But Fipps was engaged with his intended, and the others were dancing and feasting. So it always has been from the days of Abraham and Lot and of Belshazzar until now.

“Let us eat, drink, and be merry,” is the motto of the world; the storm may come to-morrow, and we may be dead before it comes.

They were silent for a minute, these two conspirators, while the lightning danced and flickered around them, like some evil mocking sprite, and the thunder roared ever louder and louder. Then the General spoke again, in a low and hoarse voice. “There is another reason why I have come here: it is for your sake, it is to see you.” Madame de Woronzow looked up at him. “I began with admiring you, I became your devoted servant, and now you are a neces-

sity to me ; you are my fate." She stepped back a pace, they had been standing close together.

"Stay, hear me out," he went on, in a strong and earnest voice. He paused a moment, for a loud clap of thunder drowned his voice. Then, "I have waited long," he said ; "I have kept down my feelings, I have sacrificed them for the sake of the cause which you are engaged in. But when I saw you in Paris a few days ago, while I was daily seeing you and listening to you, while I was always in your company, my folly, if you call it such, completely mastered me. I could wait no longer. I could not tell you all then, but, when you left, I resolved to follow you and tell you all." He paused again as if exhausted by the effort of speaking, and the mocking lightning danced again around them, revealing each other's faces, his fierce and earnest, hers pale, with mouth compressed and drooping eyelids.

She spoke next. "You have made a strange mistake. I have never thought, you cannot believe——"

He interrupted her. "You have never directly encouraged me—no ; but can I be quite indifferent to you ? Listen to me," he went on, as she looked up for a moment as if to speak. "We are bound together in one cause, I and

you, we are the leaders of it; without us it would droop altogether. Let us bind ourselves together by an indissoluble link. It is for your sake that I have toiled, and now we are working towards some consummation of our labours. Let me be yours altogether. Let us work together to the end as one. You shall decide my fate—our fates.”

The last words sounded like a menace, and she caught the meaning of them.

It was a blunder on his part. Never say to a woman, “If you do not do this I will do you evil,” because then you question her power, you assume that you are the stronger every way, and that she will never admit. General Bagrathion’s love tale was not badly told in the beginning; he seemed in earnest, and there was a subtle flattery in the mere fact of his loving. Had she been asked before this whom she would have been most gratified by as a lover, she would very likely have named General Bagrathion. She admired him. She honoured those qualities in him which had carried him through every danger and difficulty, and had justly made him a leader of revolution. Yet now that he actually was her lover she shrank from him. Now that he was no longer the soldier, the daring revolutionist, but only a man speaking

the old words that women love to hear—she felt dimly that he was, perhaps, the very last man she would be loved by. Yet she, perhaps, sympathized with him, till he used those words of vague menace. She raised her head defiantly, and a flash of light revealed his face.

She saw the danger in it, danger to herself, and instinctively she parried it. She was picking the leaves of a rose tree that stood by the balustrade round the terrace; she went on with her occupation, but watching him all the while from under her eyelids. “I do not know what to think,” she said. “It cannot be yet. I have always regarded you as my friend—my most intimate friend—but now——” she stopped.

“I will wait still longer,” he replied eagerly, “only give me some hope—promise me, if you have any regard for me, you will be mine.”

He came nearer her; he took her hand, when at this moment a fearful flash of light seemed to envelope them, and the house, and the garden. Instantly a crash of thunder shook the terrace under their feet. She started and uttered a cry of alarm. He stepped to her side to support her, in another moment she would have been in his arms, but she recovered herself by a supreme effort, and turning round slipped from his hands, already touching her.

“I thought one of us must have been struck,” she said quietly ; “it is really dangerous here, we had better go in ; and see ! it is beginning to rain.” In fact heavy drops were falling. She walked towards the glass door, and a fainter flash, a reflection as it were of the former one lighted her to the handle, but he was there before her.

“Give me one word before you go,” he said.

“You must wait,” she answered, facing him. “I cannot say now, I will see how things turn out.”

Then she went in, and he shut the door just as the rain dashed in torrents against the house. He followed her across the room and together they entered the cloak room.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST ARRIVAL.

IN the ball room Madame de Woronzow and her companion found all in confusion. That sudden clap of thunder which had shaken the great house, seemed to have put everything wrong. The dancers had stopped, the musicians had ceased playing, and the order and arrangements of the ball had come to a standstill.

No one knew what to do next. Ladies looked pale and startled, some discussing the advisability of going home at once, others insisting on staying where they were till the storm abated. Men were struggling in the disordered crowd to get to the stairs, bent on a search for glasses of wine for tender and nervous ladies, while some more wise were conducting their partners down to the refreshment rooms.

Meanwhile the lightning still flickered through the windows and the wind drove the rain against the house with a sound like that of a distant cataract.

This scene of disorder was just then favourable to Madame de Woronzow.

Her mind was confused, and in the confusion she felt in her element. Her first thought, when she found herself again in the midst of the crowd, her fixed idea was to separate herself from her lover.

She had parried rather than defeated his first unexpected attack, but she might not be able to defend herself so easily against a second attempt, which she would probably have to encounter if she again found herself alone with General Bagrathion.

She was in fear and trembling as long as he was at her side. She inwardly quaked and shivered in the hot room, and it was all she could do to prevent her hand trembling on his arm.

Happily she was soon relieved from her uncomfortable situation by the confusion around her. In the surging to and fro of the crowd an eddy of people towards the stairs forced her from her companion, and Madame de Woronzow, slipping her hand from the General's arm, was instantly separated from him, soon widely apart, as she let herself be carried hither and thither by the current of people.

Presently she ran against Fipps, who was en-

deavouring to conduct Miss Golding to the stairs.

"Oh, here you are," exclaimed Gus. "Thought you must have been struck by the thunder and lightning, or drowned in the rain, if rain it be."

"Not exactly. We were soon driven in by the storm. Are you going away now?"

"No, I was just taking Miss Golding downstairs to have a glass of wine. She has been rather startled by the storm. Awful, was it not? For the moment I really thought it must be the prelude to the final fugue."

"Nonsense!" said Madame, turning to look at the young lady by his side, a girl with light hair, pretty blue eyes, and a delicate fresh-coloured complexion—an English blonde in short, than which is there anything prettier?

She was looking just then rather pale, and wore an anxious frown on her open forehead.

"You need have no fear now," said Madame, addressing her. "You can hear the thunder is getting more and more distant, and it will soon be all over."

"Oh yes, I think so," the other replied. "I am always so foolish in a thunderstorm. I can't help it."

"I don't wonder," Madame said; "I really felt

frightened myself." (She probably said this to account for any appearance of alarm in herself.) "You know," she went on, "the best generals feel sometimes a natural timidity when they first hear the guns, so we timid creatures must expect to be frightened at such noises."

"Yes, indeed."

"Ah, and you may depend upon it," put in Gus, "this is nothing to what we shall have in the lightning and thunder line, if we go on playing with electricity and all that sort of thing."

"Fipps, instead of talking nonsense, don't you think you had better go and find Mrs. Golding; she is here, is she not?"

Gus nodded.—"Well, if Miss Golding likes I will take her to one of the refreshment rooms, where we can sit down till Mrs. Golding comes to us."

"Oh, but it is giving you so much trouble," remonstrated the younger lady.

"Not at all—I think that would be the best, and if you do not feel better your mamma can then take you away, you know."

"It would be very kind of you," said Miss Golding.

"All right," said Gus. "Where shall I find you?"

“In one of the refreshment rooms ; there are two, are there not?”

“There are three—one big one, and two small rooms.”

“Ah, you know all about them, of course. Well, you will find us in one of the smaller rooms. Come along, my dear.” So saying, Madame put Miss Golding’s hand under her arm, and walked off with her.

Madame de Woronzow soon forced her way down the stairs, catching, as she went out of the ball room, a distant side view of General Bagrathion leaning against the wall, and scowling at every one.

Arrived at the bottom of the staircase the two ladies turned into the supper room, as the larger apartment was popularly called.

This was a large square room furnished with a number of little round tables of walnut wood, and chairs to match.

There was also at one side of the room a gorgeous buffet covered with flowers and glasses, and surrounded by men and women drinking out of tiny tumblers and delicately cut wine-glasses. The room was full of people, standing or seated at the tables, while innumerable footmen, in a gorgeous light blue and gold livery, with powdered hair, glided about with trays

carrying bottles and glasses, and ices, and dainty meats.

The two ladies passed through this room, rejecting the obsequious offers of men and servants eager to wait upon them, and entered a cool and airy apartment which was fitted up to represent a grotto.

An iced and scented fountain played in the centre, and water trickled down rocks and stones which were so arranged as to form little caves and recesses, where small tables and chairs were placed for the accommodation of those who sought a quiet corner to themselves.

In one of these little recesses Madame de Woronzow and her protégée seated themselves.

"Ah!" exclaimed the latter as soon as she found herself in this cool retreat, "I feel quite well, now I am out of those dreadfully hot rooms."

She was prevented from saying more by the appearance of a footman, who seemed to have sprung from the ground in response to a secret conjuration on the part of Madame de Woronzow. However, as soon as this grand blue and gold personage had provided them with some cool lemonade the two ladies began to talk in a very confidential manner.

"I know all about you," said Madame

delicately. "Fipps does not keep many secrets from me. We are old friends, you know, and I hope you will count me among your friends too."

"Oh yes, Madame," said the other looking up and blushing a little, "I am sure I will. Gus, that is Mr. Fipps"—blushing a little more. Madame interrupted her.

"No, no! please do not be ceremonious with me. Every one calls him 'Gus,' you know. If you were to ask any one of his numerous acquaintances if they knew the Honourable Mr. Fipps, he or she would at once reply, 'Oh, Gus Fipps you mean.' So there is no reason why *you* should not call him Gus, is there?"

"Oh no. I did not know he was called so. But you see I really know so little of him. He is nearly always in Paris, and though of course we write to one another he does not tell me much about himself or his friends, and I do not like to ask him."

"No, I suppose he does not practise his hand at writing despatches to you."

Miss Golding laughed, and so they chatted together. Madame learnt that Gus and Miss Golding had been engaged for more than two years, that they were to be married in a month

or so, the decision being in the hands of papa and mamma ; that he called her Lucy and she always called him Gus ; that she was eighteen, and various other minutiae of no particular interest to any one but themselves.

Their tête-à-tête was interrupted by the arrival of Fipps and Mrs. Golding, a healthy-looking, motherly old lady, with a prim mouth and soft eyes like her daughter's. Gus thought what a pretty pair the two were seated there, the dark-haired woman, and the pretty English girl, and for the life of him, he could not determine which looked best.

As soon as Lucy had introduced Madame de Woronzow to Mrs. Golding, she declared, in reply to her mother's inquiry, that she felt quite well again, and told her how kind Madame de Woronzow had been.

Thereupon Mrs. Golding expressed her thanks, and Madame de Woronzow, saying she hoped they would continue their acquaintance, asked for Lucy to come and see her, to which Mrs. Golding readily agreed, and Gus declared he would take his fiancée to see Madame. Then he proceeded to claim Madame for a waltz, which he stated she had promised him.

"I was just going away," Madame said in reply to this proposition ; "but, however, since I

promised, I will dance for a few minutes with you."

So she shook hands with the other ladies and returned with Fipps to the ball room. After dancing a short time with the delighted Gus, she declared she must go. They went down the stairs together, and, bidding him go back to Miss Golding, Madame de Woronzow turned into the cloak room.

On emerging thence, a dove-grey opera cloak lined with pink over her shoulders, Madame looked at her watch and found that it still wanted twenty minutes to the hour at which she had told her coachman to return.

He might, however, be there, and she sent a footman out to see if her carriage was waiting. He soon returned, saying it had not come. She waited five minutes—to no purpose. She began to grow fidgety. What if General Bagrathion should come down the stairs and find her there? He had seen her go and would probably not stay much longer. People were beginning to leave—the more respectable and strait-laced portion of the assembly. The hall was full of opera cloaks, with here and there a waterproof. Opera hats were bustling hither and thither, and calling with loud voices for their friends and their carriages, while outside could be heard the

intermittent sounds of wheels on the gravel drive, and of carriage doors, closed sharply, as guest after guest was driven away in the pouring rain.

In the midst of this bustle it was with difficulty that Madame de Woronzow gained the attention of a footman with a great coat on ready to run out for carriages.

"Please see if you can get me a cab," she said to the man; "I shall not wait for my carriage."

The man went out, and she heard him blow a whistle, but he returned in a few minutes, saying there were no cabs near. "There were not many cabs about such a night," the man remarked.

"Can you procure me a waterproof," said Madame; "I shall walk home."

The man remonstrated with her. It was impossible for any lady to walk in such a night. Her ladyship's carriage could not be long.

Madame de Woronzow was at her wits' end.

Every moment she expected to see General Bagrathion in the hall and at her side, ready to offer his unwelcome services.

She dared not go back to the feasting and dancing, for she did not know now where she might not encounter Bagrathion.

What should she do ?

At this moment, amidst the carriages taking guests away, a hansom cab drove up to the porch, the footboards were thrown aside and a tall man sprang out.

A guest arriving at this late hour !

He called out to his driver, "You need not come back, Watkins," and strode through the door into the hall, glancing to right and left at the departing guests. He caught sight of Madame de Woronzow standing with the footman beside her, awaiting her orders.

He gazed at the beautiful and perplexed face before him ; he hesitated, he stopped. "Is anything amiss ; can I be of any service ?" he asked.

"My lady's carriage has not arrived," explained the footman, hoping to get out of the trouble.

"My cab is entirely at your disposal," the new arrival said to Madame.

"Oh no, thank you, it does not matter."

A lady's "No" often means "Yes." The man considered the reply in this light and acted accordingly.

"My man is going home and can take you back," he said. He looked at her, saw she was hesitating and turned round ; "I will call him back."

"No, don't," she said; "it is raining;" but he was already outside the porch, and they heard him give one pealing shout.

"Oh! he will be wet through," said Madame, aloud, to herself. She heard another more distant shout, and in a few minutes the cab returned.

The man sprang out, dripping wet, and splashed with mud.

He came up to Madame de Woronzow, and with a bow offered her his arm.

He had the grace and gallantry in his bearing of a nobleman of Queen Elizabeth's Court, quite unlike the men of our day.

He looked as if he ought to have worn a rich doublet and hose.

Madame de Woronzow put her hand on his arm with a smile—all the thanks she vouchsafed him, and together they walked to the porch.

The odds are ten to one that when you have done a pretty woman a service, she will make fun of you; but after all this is as pleasant as the most profuse thanks.

"I am in luck to-night," said the lady's escort, in a low voice, looking meantime into her laughing eyes. "I have been winning at cards, and now fortune has been still more kind."

“Do you consider it lucky to get wet through,” she answered, glancing at his sopped coat. “Why not try jumping into the Thames?”

“I would in a moment at your bidding,” was his reply. She got into the cab while he held her train to prevent it catching on the wheels. Then he leant over the footboard and asked: “Where shall I tell him to drive to?”

“Rose Lodge, Yorkshire Terrace, please.”

“What name?” asked he, smiling.

“It is not necessary to know my name,” she answered, laughing; “there is no brass plate on my door.”

“Well, but surely you might let me know by what name I am to remember you?”

“You will get drenched, if you stop here,” was all her answer. His hair was beginning to drip.

“What do I care?” he said.

“But the rain is wetting me too.”

“Shall I have to run after the cab, to learn your name at your house, instead of from your—lips;” (with an eloquent pause before “lips”).

“I think that will be the best,” looking at him with mocking eyes, laughing.

“Very well,” said he, and put on his hat, resolutely.

"Don't be foolish," she said; "you certainly do not flatter me; I did not think I was so unknown. I am Countess Woronzow."

"Countess Woronzow," he repeated, pronouncing the name perfectly. "My name is Count Jagellon, at your——"

She interrupted him. "Count Jagellon! Is it possible?"

"Do you know my name?" he asked in surprise.

Her face had suddenly become grave. "I know it well," she said; she looked at him earnestly for a moment. "You must be the son of the Polish General."

"Yes," he said, simply.

"How strange!" she murmured; then she held out her hand. "Come to see me to-morrow." He just touched her white gloved hand with his, he bared his head to the falling rain, then stepped back and gave the direction to his coachman. The windows of the cab were let down, and she was driven away.

As he turned to re-enter the house he saw General Bagrathion standing in the doorway with his hat over his eyes. Count Jagellon only knew him by sight.

He passed him carelessly (though the General was staring fiercely at him), and walked up the

hall rather jauntily, with a look of triumph on his face. A number of people were standing and sitting there waiting for their carriages, a crowd of men and women. They had watched the scene before them ; they had watched and envied.

They made way markedly for the wet and bespattered man. Perhaps the women hated him at the moment because he had given another woman all his attention, while he only glanced at them, for alas, none of them were worth even a glance, he thought.

The men envied him naturally. He paid no regard to either sex there ; he was used to this treatment, and did not mind it. He coolly shook the water off his wet hat on to the soft carpet, and either some drops bespattered the dress of a fat and haughty lady standing by—none other in fact than Lady E—— wife of the Ex-Lord-Chancellor—or the lady fancied it, for she turned on him as he passed, saying savagely, “Thank you.” He turned round and begged her pardon and went on, without heeding the stony gaze with which the lady received his amende.

“He should be more careful,” said my lord, her husband, in a severe tone. Some one else remarked that he might have dried himself, and a gentleman added a rider to the effect that he could not probably help himself as he could not

afford a cab. Though delivered in an audible voice, these several remarks did not appear to reach the object of them. He was drawing on a pair of the whitest gloves, and was looking at some rosy-cheeked ladies coming out of the supper-room. Presently he was hailed by some acquaintances going up the stairs, and was soon the centre of a group of laughing and chaffing men and women.

"He is like an Isle of Skye terrier in the grass on a dewy morn," remarked a poetical gentleman.

"More like a seal from the Zoo," put in a lady.

"Is that your bathing costume?" inquired another person. Thus, what with some of the people chaffing, and others trying to avoid contact with the wet and bespattered man, a crowd was soon formed, blocking up the staircase and causing considerable confusion in the neighbourhood. The new arrival received the observations on his appearance with perfect good-humour, returning the compliments of the people round him with the sort of nonsense that is always acceptable during the late hours of a ball. The group on the stairs grew every moment more boisterous, and at last it ended in the whole posse rushing upstairs in a body,

headed by Count Jagellon, who was dragging up with him a stout and laughing lady.

In the ball room the Count came full upon Gus Fipps, who was taking Mrs. and Miss Golding to their carriage.

Gus looked half amused and half annoyed at this rencontre.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"Had to run after a carriage, that's all. Are you going?"

He glanced, as he was speaking, at Miss Golding. She was looking intently at him, thinking perhaps how she would like to have her carriage fetched for her by such a big handsome runner, and she turned her eyes away, blushing, when they met his.

All this passed in half a minute, and the Count was forced on by the pressure behind, before another word could be said.

The new arrival and his followers carried confusion and *tapage* into the midst of the ball room. Count Jagellon at two A.M. in a ball room, was in his element.

Here, there and everywhere he went, his brown head towering above the laughing, talking, and flirting mob. He seemed to infuse his animal spirits into every one.

There was more space in the ball room now,

for half of the company had gone, and the unfortunate people who remained, after they had been jostling one another for two or three hours, at length roused themselves for a desperate attempt to be merry. Every moment the laughter grew more uproarious, the *bon mots* more piquant, and the flirtations more *prononcés*.

The monotonous waltz which the band was playing was, at the suggestion of Count Jagellon, exchanged for a galop; the band struck up a lively air, and to it every one went, whirling round and round in dizzy mazes, scudding up and down the rooms, with occasional collisions, with here and there a heap of slain, laughing and struggling on the floor. Fast and furious was the dancing, and ladies' dresses were torn and rent, and lace and flowers strewed the floor. Some rash young men rushed down to the supper-room, rushed up again with glasses of wine, and they had no sooner entered the room than they were run down by a whirling couple, and men and glasses were thrown to the ground with a horrid jingle. Then the scene changed; a cotillon was proposed.

"Can you dance it?" "Who will lead?" "I don't know how." "Go ahead, you people!"

Such were some of the cries bandied about.

Then Gus Fipps came forward and volunteered his services. He was greeted with exclamations of "Bravo, Gus!" "Oh, the dear Gus!" "Five to one on Gus against the heavy weight," etc.

What was the cotillon to be? "Oh, 'Love and Marriage.' I know, I danced it in Paris. It was the rage there."

"Places for the cotillon!" this uttered in a loud voice by Count Jagellon.

Then the dancers were arranged in a circle, back to back; that is to say, each partner faced the other, so that every lady was back-to-back of a gentleman.

Count Jagellon and Gus stood in the centre of the ring. In the first movement every gentleman dropped on one knee to his partner. Next the gentlemen rose and took their partner's hands, or in some cases put an arm round the lady's waist.

Then every one turned round, so that each gentleman waltzed with the lady at his back.

But here a tumult arose through some ladies and gentlemen persisting in dancing with their original partners.

Then arose cries of "forfeit," and one lady was condemned to kiss a gentleman, and one man had to dance blindfold, Jagellon and Fipps delivering judgment. After this they began the movement all over again.

And so the fun went on, while men and women seemed to throw off the restraints of society, and in the dancing wives were hugged and perhaps kissed by strange men.

Many of the ladies' dresses had become disordered, and had been torn, probably in the *mêlée* of the previous galop.

One lady's dress in some way became disarranged and loosened in front, so that, in the then prevailing fashion of extremely low ball dresses, her costume was such as to occasion remark. Nor did she discover her condition while she was waltzing, till another lady kindly whispered to her what was amiss, when she arranged her dress with a nervous laugh.

Another lady had one of the large flounces of her dress torn off.

The beautiful Mrs. Guinness Price had the sleeve of her dress almost torn from her shoulder, and as it partly held up the body of her dress, this began to hang down in a very awkward manner.

She was a young and noted beauty—not long married, with a nervous mouth and flushed cheeks. She had been dancing or flirting during the greater part of the evening with Lord Uttoxeter, a middle-aged peer of the realm, whose character was such, that had he been of

any lesser rank, he would have been tabooed by society. My lord managed to tie up the sleeve with a piece of ribbon, taking as his reward a kiss, which he imprinted on the round white shoulder with his slobbery lips—

“Castiora—quam os ejus,”

as the daring Roman girl said to Tigellinus.

Over all this disorder, and indiscriminate mixture of persons appeared the head and brown eyes of Count Jagellon dominating the throng of dancers. He alone was cool and collected, he alone was graceful and orderly in his bearing while he arranged the dancers for the cotillon and adjudged the forfeits. It was curious to see how he ruled and was obeyed by these turbulent people on this occasion.

Probably these same people at any other time would have utterly rebelled against him, and snubbed him as he was snubbed by the more respectable folk in the hall just before. But he was not suited to the age, he was not of this world. Had he been a gallant of the Court of brave Queen Bess, for instance, he might have been one of her Essexes or Howards or Raleighs, so faithful in love, so gallant in Court, so brave in war. He had all the appearance of one of those gallants with his graceful figure, fit to be

set off by the bravery of those days, and not concealed by the melancholy fashions of modern times ; and then his moustachios curled upwards naturally so as to show his laughing mouth, instead of drooping downwards as most of our present moustachios do, making the face more solemn instead of more lively.

So he was as a stranger, a mere waif and stray of society ruling it to-night, to be slighted and cut on the morrow. What qualities he had were not required ; he fitted in nowhere ; he was *nothing*. But for the present he was in his element, when

“ The brief night goes
In babble and revel and wine.”

He was the ruling spirit of the time. No sooner was the “ Love ” part of the cotillon finished than he, with the assistance of Gus, who by this time was as wild as the rest—the correct Gus—arranged the “ Marriage ” figure, forming the dancers in two long lines of couples back-to-back ; then each line advanced, and each couple went through a mimic marriage service, then lines met together again, and partners were exchanged as before.

At length the dancers seemed to grow tired of this play. A few still continued the waltz, but for the rest it was not wild or boisterous

enough for them; they desired some more *enivrant* pleasure. The laughter now had a bitter sound, and a falseness in its ring; men's voices were hoarse and passionate; women's eyes were sparkling, angry-looking, filled with a wild vague desire. The supper room was now thronged with people drinking glass after glass of sparkling wine; one or two men were asleep on the chairs, one was lying on the floor drunk with wine; one lady, a tender and delicate lady, reeled from the room, clutching at the wall or a chair to steady herself, and called for her husband and her carriage in a shrill unnatural voice.

The people were exhausted with their pleasures, the ball was nearly over.

The host and hostess had already retired to some quieter room; they had been put aside and disregarded by their guests; they had become affrighted at the wild *tapage* in their house, and had prudently left their guests to themselves.

The scene was closing—London had nearly finished its night-work. And Count Jagellon drank off a bumper of foaming wine, put on his hat and went out into the cool grey morning and the gently falling rain.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE EARLY MORNING.

IN the grey coolness of the morning, in the refreshing rain of the dawn, while a breeze from the west wafted from the Park the delicate scents of the awakened flowers, and in the stillness could be heard the twittering of birds, innocent of midnight pleasures, Count Jagellon stepped out to walk home.

The rain was not uncomfortable ; his garments could not be very much worse spoiled by it now, and the air was so fresh and cool after the storm, and after, too, those horrible hot rooms, that it was positively a pleasure to be out in the cool rain. With a cigar to soothe one, now, it would be quite perfect. Fortunately he had one in his breast pocket, but alas ! he had not wherewithal to light it.

He stopped to search all his pockets ; he had just turned into Park Lane when this difficulty occurred.

He did not notice a man who was standing by the wall of Mecklenburgh House—a man in an Inverness overcoat, with an umbrella to shelter him—till he was addressed with the question,—

“I beg your pardon, could you tell me if General Bagrathion has yet left the ball here?”

The Count turned to his questioner. “Why, let me see, he must have gone nearly a couple of hours ago. He left just as I came, and that was about two o’clock.”

“Oh, indeed,” said the man, with a slight accent of surprise, but without any expression of it on his face. “I am much obliged to you.”

He was turning away, but Jagellon having noticed that he was smoking a cigarette, and considering that one good turn deserved another, asked for a light for his cigar.

“With pleasure,” said the man, putting down his umbrella and searching in a pocket of his Inverness.

While Count Jagellon was lighting his cigar, the other probably noticed that he was completely exposed to the weather.

“You have no umbrella,” he remarked. “Will you oblige me by accepting mine? I am going this way,” indicating northwards.

“No, thanks. I have been wet through once, and I do not mind a repetition of it.”

“But,” persisted the other, “you would do well to take what shelter you can. You see I can take no harm by the rain, and I do not require my umbrella.”

He had a wide-awake hat on, and his overcoat was long enough to prevent him getting wet. Jagellon saw no reason to refuse the offer. The man was plainly, perhaps shabbily, dressed, but his speech and voice proclaimed him a gentleman, and now-a-days a man’s speech is about the best proof of his gentility. Dress and general appearance go for nothing, or else your horse-dealer, your butcher, and your haberdasher’s assistant might pass muster. This man spoke with a remarkably pure accent—too precise, in fact, for an ordinary English gentleman.

If he were one of the irregular troops that war on honesty, his appearance belied him; besides, he knew General Bagrathion, and that was a sufficient guarantee. He might be a spy. What! a spy in matter-of-fact London?—the idea was ridiculous!

These are my own conjectures, not Count Jagellon’s; he did not think anything bad of his companion; he was rather interested in his sad, careworn, but resolute face—the face of a

man that has passed through many dangers and sorrows, and faced and borne them all.

He took the proffered umbrella with thanks, and together they strolled up the Lane.

"You have had a gay party, I should imagine," said the stranger. "One wonders how such numbers of people can find room even in such a large house as Baron Rosencranz's."

"They can't," remarked Jagellon, as he puffed a cloud of smoke under the umbrella, "It is a struggle for existence, I assure you."

"I suppose so—even pleasure has become a struggle."

"Well, for my part, I do not call these infernal balls a pleasure. I go to them or not, just as the fancy takes me; in fact it was a mere freak that I went there," indicating with his head the house they had left—"Or fate," he added, half to himself.

The other heard it.

"Do you believe in fate?" he asked. "Well, I suppose it is only fools who do not."

"Exactly," said Jagellon. "Devilish queer thing one's luck is."

"Yours is, perhaps—everybody's is not."

"Well, yes, I think mine *is* a queer life."

"So I should imagine."

"Why?"

“On account of the peculiarity of your birth and position, I mean,” said the other quietly.

Count Jagellon turned to look at his companion.

“Why, the devil! You don’t know me, do you?”

“Yes, I think so. Have I not the honour of addressing Count Jagellon?”

Jagellon stood still and examined the countenance of the man, who on his side fixed his sad grey eyes on his companion.

“Well, I *am* d—d!” said the Count. “This is the oddest thing I ever met with. Here I have come across two perfect strangers to me, who know *my* name pat. I suppose I must be a celebrity.”

The man smiled. “May I ask who the other was?” he said.

“A lady whom I helped into a carriage?—a Countess Woronzow. Do you know her?”

“Certainly I know her—slightly; I am not surprised she should know your name, or rather your father’s,” he added in a lower tone. They walked on.

“Did *you* know my father?” asked Jagellon.

“Yes, I served under him, I fought under him, I fled with him.”

“You are a Pole, then?”

“ Yes.”

On hearing this reply Count Jagellon experienced the pleasure of a new sensation.

It was like the sensation of returning to your country after a voyage abroad ; it was the sensation of meeting with your only friend after years of absence. Count Jagellon had many acquaintances, he did not possess one friend : he was an Englishman, Frenchman, German, anything you like, but he had, strictly speaking, no country of his own.

“ *La Patrie* ” was a phrase which brought no ideas to his mind. But this man by his side, though an utter stranger to him, had an intimate connection with him. He was his father’s friend, he was his own countryman, he had fought, possibly bled, for the only land which Count Jagellon by sole right of natural feeling could call his own. It was no wonder, then, that the Count felt a strong sympathy with his companion. He began to question him.

The two men had by this time reached the top of Park Lane, and both turned without question to the left in the direction of Jagellon’s lodgings.

“ Have you been in London ever since—since my father came ? ”

“ Oh no, I have only recently settled in Lon-

don. I was engaged in '30, again in '48, and I have revisited Poland several times besides those two occasions."

"What is it like?"

"Poland?"

"Yes."

"It is a beautiful and homely country. It is sad; its towns are poor and spiritless—lifeless. I can remember them full of life and gaiety—pleasant places enough to dwell in. Doubtless you remember the story of the Roman returning to his country and kissing the earth; that is exactly what I feel every time I visit Poland."

"I should like to see it," said Jagellon.

"You have never seen it?"

"No."

There was silence between them for a minute or so. Then Jagellon said,—

"Have you no friends here?"

"Oh, many. All of one mind, aiming at one object."

"You mean the liberation of Poland?"

"I mean," said the Pole, "the liberation of Poland and of all European peoples enslaved by the despotisms of the East. "Believe me, this is the pith of what is called the Eastern Question, and our work will surely

come to pass, though I believe not in our lifetime."

"It is a splendid idea, but how can you do it? Who is to help you?"

"No one. *Aide toi*: you know the proverb."

The dialogue ceased again for a moment, while they turned off the main road into a street leading into that in which the Count lived. Jagellon spoke again.

"This is my street. I live over the way there," pointing to a row of smaller houses at the end of the street. "I am afraid," he added, "I have taken you out of your way."

"Oh, it does not matter," said his companion, "I am very much pleased to have met you."

"So am I; I hope we shall see more of one another. By the bye, I don't know your name."

"I must not tell you my real name, but I am known as Mr. Mentzel. Stop, I can give you one of my cards."

He fumbled in his breast-pocket, and at last produced a tradesman's card, which he handed to Jagellon. On it was engraved—

JOHN MENTZEL,

Carver and Picture Frame Maker,

16, Vulture Street, Holborn.

"Is that what you do?" said Jagellon.

"Well it is partly to conceal myself, you see, but I manage to keep body and soul together with the business."

"Well, look here, I want some frames for pictures, so I will call at your place."

"Do so by all means, I shall always be glad to see you."

"And come to see me whenever you like; only drop me a line to make sure I am in. And," he added, "if I can ever be of any service to you, please make use of me."

"I will," replied the other; "I thank you."

"This is my place, No. 18, Cambridge Street—you won't forget."

"Oh, no—good night."

"Good night."

They shook hands and parted.

Jagellon stopped at his door to look at the retreating figure, so sad, so sombre—truly the figure of a much-enduring man. He walked slowly down the street, but his step was firm—firmer than most men's of his age and of his grizzly locks. Jagellon watched him till he disappeared at the end of the street, and then he entered the house.

CHAPTER IV.

COUNT JAGELLON AT HOME.

THE Count lay on a soft-cushioned sofa in front of the open window, on the sill of which were placed pots of flowers, geraniums and fuchsias, and mignonette and forget-me-nots.

The hour was about half-past one; the day precisely the same as that in which the events of the last chapter took place, only now it was afternoon instead of early morning.

The remnants, such as they were, of a breakfast stood on the table in the room, and a catalogue of these fragments may perhaps give some slight idea of the man who had just partaken of his morning repast:—

A dish containing a single mutton cutlet.

The remains of a cold chicken.

A dish containing oyster-shells.

A bottle of pickles.

A bottle labelled “Zeltinger Wein—Herren So-and-so, Bingen.”

A bottle with Bass and Co.’s label thereon.

A coffee-pot—a cup and saucer.

Sundry knives, forks, plates, &c., &c.

The furniture of the room was consistent with these trifles. Besides the sofa there were two lounges, and there was a chiffonier on which stood a liqueur stand, one bottle of which was missing, and now stood on the window-sill beside a small glass containing a yellowish liquid. On the walls hung foils, swords, pistols, guns, foxes' brushes, a deer's head, and sundry pictures—pictures of famous race-horses, a Greuze, and a couple of nude female figures by French painters.

Notwithstanding the somewhat sporting character of the furniture there was a general air of luxury about the apartment; it smacked a little of a lady's boudoir. The sofa and chairs were covered with yellow and maroon silk. There were pretty lace curtains to the windows; there was a mahogany escritoire and bookshelf; the floor was covered with a soft Brussels carpet, and by the hearth was a leopard skin on which lay a Newfoundland dog asleep.

The occupant himself, too, had a rather effeminate appearance as he lay languidly on the sofa in his dark blue dressing-gown with scarlet girdle, gazing dreamily out of the window at the bright sunlight. For the storm and the rain

of the night had passed away and were forgotten, and the day was warm and bright.

But the Count did not seem to regard the sunshine, nor to hear the sound of the brisk carriages driving up and down the street; he was thinking of something else—thinking, I fancy, of a dark-haired woman with a dove-grey opera cloak.

We have already learnt something of the antecedents of Count Jagellon, and some further particulars may possibly be interesting. We have heard that he was the son of General Count Jagellon, a leader in the insurrections of 1830 and 1848. After the failure of these attempts the General, forced to fly his country, came to England, where he was kindly received by society. For at that time the people of England were, I believe, heartily interested in unfortunate Poland. They considered that the nation was being bullied, and, as it is their nature to do, they hated the bully, and took the side of the weak one, who was being bullied. It is only of late that John Bull has become rather touchy on the question of Poland, owing to the insinuations of clever continental journalists, who, by persistently comparing the conditions of Ireland and Poland, have contrived to make the subject a sore one. But thirty or forty years ago people were still ardent

well-wishers of the poor Poles, and the heroic Polish general had not dwelt long in London before he was beloved, and returned the affection of an heiress of some pretensions to beauty, and possessed of a fortune of some forty or fifty thousand pounds, left her by her father, a decently successful stockbroker. In short, General Jagellon, seeing that the affairs of his country were for the present in a hopeless condition, married the heiress, Miss Todd, as she was called, and determined for the time being to settle in England. But three or four years after the birth of their only child, the present Count Wenceslaus Jagellon, the General died ; probably anxiety about his country fretted away his already worn-out life, and when the boy was only eighteen he lost his mother as well. She had remained faithful to her first love, rejecting one or two advantageous offers of remarriage, and had taken care to give her son an excellent education, not forgetting to have him taught his father's native language.

Thus while still a boy Count Jagellon found himself launched alone on the world, with a comfortable income to live on, but without friends, without relations of any value, without anything but mere cash in hand. For, having just entered the University of Oxford when his

mother died, he very soon went after his own inventions, and though he rapidly made acquaintances of his own, he very soon lost the votes of the friends and relations of his family. To cut short what might become a tedious recital, he found himself, at the age of twenty-six, with less than half his fortune, and little better in position than when he was first launched upon the sea of the world.

The reason for this is not far to seek. His abilities were rather such as would make others envious than gain him success. He was what is called a brilliant young man—*un jeune homme charmant*, as the French say. His accomplishments were varied and shining, instead of being useful and particular.

At the University he made his mark. He was *proxime accessit* for the Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse, and it was said that he would have obtained the prize, so extraordinary were the Latin verses which he composed, had it not been for an unfortunate error of syntax, which precluded the judges from giving him the meed of scholarship.

Besides the more solid accomplishments of classical learning, and the attainment of various modern languages, he was a splendid horseman, a good "gun," a dead shot with the pistol, a really

good player on the piano, and possessed a tenor voice of much sweetness.

But notwithstanding all these shining qualities, which one would think might have won him a position in any set and in any society, he was not a popular man, partly because there was a certain recklessness and waywardness in his disposition which startled people instead of winning them; but, more than all, because he lived in an age which, I think, has learned to view splendid abilities with sober distaste.

The world is getting old now; it is perhaps wise with the experience of æons; it is no longer in the heyday of youth, ardently aiming at an ideal of beauty, and freedom, and pleasure.

And now that we have learnt to look at the stars in the firmament of history with the eye of reason and of scientific research, we have discovered that these planets did not shine in a useful manner on the greatest number of men, and that, on the whole, we are best without them.

What we require now is a useful, practical, business-like sort of man.

Our statesmen should be moderate men—in abilities as well as in policy.

We don't require *clever* men, and we do not care for any more wonderful orators.

We merely want practical men of the world, who are not a whit more clever than everybody else, to carry on the business of statecraft, with its Railway Bills, and Public Works, and Contagious Diseases Acts.

Our generals should be men well versed in the Queen's Regulations, and capable of looking after the Commissariat Department.

Should any officer be found with a tendency to performing dangerously daring exploits, and a taste for difficult enterprises, he should be suppressed—by appointing him Governor of some remote island, or over some unhealthy clime, where his unseasonable ardour may be toned down by inanition or inaction of the liver.

The same rule of useful practicability no doubt applies to the arts—the pleasures of our generation. Let us have simple and prettily-coloured pictures to ornament our rooms and refresh the eye wearied with labour. Therefore, O ambitious young artist! do not fill your head with ardent dreams of perfect beauty, or train your hand to limn beings which have no existence in our thoroughfares, and landscapes which are unknown in our suburbs. We have no time—it is positively a bore—to contemplate and study the artistic beauty of a picture. We would preserve only antique works that aim at beauty,

on account of their archæological value, and can relegate them to musty museums and tenantless mansions, to be preserved for the student of antiquity—let us hope, not *burnt*. But for the art of our enlightened day, let it be simple and useful, to teach the lessons of subdued feeling and proper morality; an art, in short, which any fool may understand, and any simpleton recognize. Yes, no doubt these views are just, and in accordance with the advanced science and reason of our age.

“Though yet, but, ah! that haughty wish is vain,”

I must confess I have a sneaking kindness for some of those good old times, and I should like just a little to have lived with and seen those brilliant men that used to be. Without wishing for the far-off days of the dim records of Egypt or the fragments of Greece, or the ruins of Rome, one likes to think of the time when Fox and Sheridan played and spoke, and Byron “loved and sung.”

It is the old Adam in us that tempts us to wish for these things—to wish that we had been in the House of Commons when it was a Senate whose utterances were heard throughout the world, even above the thrilling tumult of the French Convention—in the House, “when,”

as Horace Walpole says, "Sheridan came in half-tipsy and made the best speech he ever heard;" or on that memorable occasion when he sank exhausted into the arms of the orator Burke. Or, again, one would have liked to have heard Fox, arrived post haste from Newmarket, grow indignant on the subject of freedom (his hobby, you know), till the assembly trembled at the fierceness of his denunciations and was silent. One would even like to have been one of the first to read those verses about Scotch reviewers, or hail the appearance of the first Canto of "Don Juan," or gaze on the fresh beauties of Reynolds and Romney. But all these things are forbidden fruit; we know now that such men are a mistake; that Fox, as the historian says, "was merely a brilliant sophist, not gifted with any extraordinary political penetration;" that Sheridan was a mere actor, Burke a mistaken philanthropist, and Byron not fit for the society of virtuous ladies and gentlemen.

In such times as those, I dare say Count Jagellon might have flourished and been something; as it was, most people were shocked at him, and the rest envied him. There were exceptions, it is true; they were to be found in the less educated half of mankind—I refer to

the gentler and more foolish sex. With women the Count was to some extent successful—amongst the younger and less experienced.

We often hear it deplored that women are so little educated, and it must be confessed that this is a blot on our civilization; but we may hope that this will soon be removed, and that women will become as learned and staid as the other half of creation. I cannot help feeling some doubt on the subject; I fear that sweet woman will always be perverse; she will like what she chooses, and love whom she likes.

However, the majority of society disapproved of Count Jagellon and such as he, and they smiled on a different sort of man—such an one as entered the Count's room while he was lying there on the sofa, namely, the Hon. Mr. Fipps.

As Fipps entered, the dog raised his head from the leopard's skin, eyed the visitor, gave a satisfactory sniff and a snort, then replaced his head on the rug and went to sleep again. There was absolutely nothing in Gus's appearance with which the most captious critic could find fault. His figure recalled the style of those ill-fated Oysters, of whom it is written—

“ Their clothes were brushed, their faces washed,
Their shoes were clean and neat.”

For Fipps's coat was new, made by the best of Bond-Street tailors; his hat, shining, glossy, came from the latest Bond-Street hatter; and his boots were simply perfect, so well polished were they, so close-fitting round his foot and ankle, with their tops of delicate kid prettily buttoned (as you saw when he sat down on one of the lounges and nursed his neat little leg). To a certain extent Fipps owes his success in the Diplomatic service to his boots; for, in order to succeed now-a-days, you must have some special subject which you make your own, the more apparent the better, so that your own particular light may shine before the world. Now the reason of Fipps's appearance in Count Jagellon's rooms on this afternoon was twofold. He was afflicted with a craving for seltzer-water (of which he knew the Count had a plentiful supply), and it would have been incorrect to have imbibed large quantities of this liquid at his club, or even at his own rooms; and, besides, he wanted to know all about the Count's singular appearance at the ball.

"Have you breakfasted? Will you take something?" asked the Count.

"Oh, I've breakfasted; that is to say, I made a pretence of eating a grilled leg. Why the deuce that woman cooks me a fowl's leg whenever I

have been to a ball, I can't imagine; it is the very last thing I ever fancy—except, of course, eggs and bacon."

"Couldn't eat your breakfast?" said Jagellon cheerfully. "Where the devil did you go afterwards?"

"My dear fellow, I went straight off to bed, and woke this morning with a splitting headache, the result of drinking Rosencranz's champagne. 'Pon my word, that fellow does give you the most awful decoctions to drink."

"Oh, it is part of the contract, you know," put in the Count; "he can give you good wine—devilish good on occasions. Have something to drink; try Chartreuse; it is a very grateful sort of pick-me-up, I assure you."

"No, thanks; too strong a medicine for me. You haven't any seltzer, have you?" Fipps remarked, casually.

"Plenty; would you mind ringing that bell? Have a cigarette?" he added, pointing to a box on the table.

Watkins (the Count's factotum, coachman, valet, and sometimes cook), on his arrival, was ordered to bring glasses and seltzer, and to take the breakfast things away. While he was performing the latter operation, Fipps regarded

the fragments of the repast with an envious eye.

"How ever you can eat a sumptuous meal after drinking that confounded mixture, beats me," he said.

"Why, any one would be hungry after the exercise I had last night," replied Jagellon.

"Yes," assented Fipps; "you had a lot of exercise, I admit, running after carriages, lugging fat women about, and leading that cotillon. Awful rot, those cotillons."

By this time Watkins had deftly cleared the remains of breakfast away and had departed.

"I say, Fipps," said Count Jagellon, abruptly, "who is Countess Woronzow—do you know her?"

"Rather. She's the wife of that Russian fellow, you know, that's always floating about Paris."

"Oh, you mean that man they say is so rich—always at the Folies?"

Fipps nodded.

"Didn't know he was married——"

"You mean he is so very much unmarried. Well, the fact is, they are as good as separated. He simply fluctuates between St. Petersburg and Paris; he's some appointment at Court, you

know; and she—well, I fancy she goes where she likes, generally without him. I fancy she knows more than she ought.”

“How do you mean?” asked the Count, turning to his companion.

“Well, I fancy—in fact, I know—she is mixed up with politics.”

“Oh, ah, yes,” said the other.

“I don’t know exactly what she does,” Fipps went on, “but I fancy she is mixed up with some of those revolutionary affairs in Poland. She is a great friend of General Bagrathion’s, you know. Why, last night I saw her go off with him to look at the storm, as she said. Storm be hanged! they were up to some game, I am certain.”

“Is she a Russian?” asked the Count.

“No, Polish woman.”

“Oh, a Pole, is she?”

“Yes. My idea is,” continued Fipps, with a mysterious air, “that Bagrathion is simply a link between the Russian Government and some of those societies with whom it coquettes, and Madame Woronzow is the link between him and the societies.”

“Very possibly.”

“Do you know her?” asked Fipps, after a pause.

“Madame de Woronzow? never set eyes on her until last night.”

“Mere accident, I suppose?”

In reply to this Jagellon related shortly the circumstances of his adventure, omitting most of the chief points in it, including nearly all the conversation that took place on the occasion. After this recital, to hear which was one of the objects of Mr. Fipps’s call, and after sundry comments on it, he declared himself refreshed and rested, and decided to go to his club.

On his departure Count Jagellon dressed himself carefully, ordered his cab, and drove to the residence of Countess Woronzow. The door was opened by a servant of foreign appearance and in black livery. “Madame la Comtesse was not at home.” The Count handed the man his card and departed. He called again on the next day. Madame la Comtesse was not at home. What day would the Countess receive? The servant did not know. Madame was at present out of town. When would she return? The servant did not know. On the receipt of this intelligence the Count thought for a moment, then he put his finger into his waistcoat pocket, and said,—

“Will you let me know when Madame de

Woronzow returns? She requested me to see her; and here's a sovereign for your trouble."

The man bowed deferentially, took the money, quietly thanked the donor, and said he would do as Monsieur le Comte desired. And the Count departed in his cab.

CHAPTER V.

A FATEFUL ACCIDENT.

THE second or third day after Count Jagellon's unsuccessful expedition in search of Madame de Woronzow was, strange to say, a fine warm summer's day, even after the previous fine days and the thunderstorm. For it is generally conceded by impartial foreigners that the English summer contains not more than three fine days together with a good storm.

It is true that, eastwards over the sultry city, whither Mr. Saul Golding had just driven off in his brougham, there hung a gloomy fog, owing probably to the fact of the wind being in the east; but in the parks, in Kensington Gardens and in Tyburnia generally, it was bright sunshine, and a deliciously hot morning.

I, for my part—for we mortals have a knack of fancying that the accidents of stupendous fate are decreed for our own behoof—I cannot help thinking that this fine morning was simply ordained because Miss Lucy Golding had resolved to take an early ride on the

occasion with her future husband, that unknowingly happy man.

By the bye, do bridegrooms appreciate to the full the value of their brides? As a rule I fear they do not. Do we not often see a young man, whom we cannot help envying as a singularly happy and fortunate individual, provokingly unconscious of any particular heaven being in store for him? Mr. Fipps, for instance, was simply *reconciled* to being affianced to Lucy, and it had probably never hitherto entered his head that he was a person peculiarly favoured by love and the fates. But I fancy (it is mere fancy) that Fate and the sun thought differently; they took an interest in Miss Lucy. The sun was "shining with all his might," and evidently trying to look through the chinks left by the blinds and curtains of the house, and to peep through the stained glass window of the porch, in order, if possible, to obtain a view of the fair one as she flitted about the house. Meanwhile the groom with his horses was waiting outside somewhat impatiently, or at least the horses were, for the charming burden one of them was to bear.

Mr. Golding's house was at the end of one of those rows of fine houses which overlook the park. It stood out imposingly, facing west-

ward and southward up the long line of road and across the green expanse of park and gardens. Mr. Golding had obtained possession of this mansion as a good bargain several years before the date of this story, when he was still a rising young banker and a junior partner in the City, and Lucy had been born and had grown up within its solid, comfortable walls. The house seemed to represent solidity, the solidity of a man worth a quarter of a million of money, and integrity, the integrity of the banker who (*mirabile dictu*) had never been known to do a dirty trick.

Mr. Golding, in fact, was an old-fashioned sort of banker, as different from such men as Baron Rosencranz as a Strozzi from a Scotch manager. He believed in principles of business, and in legitimate banking, and he never dreamt of making his profits by an assiduous attendance in the purlieus of Throgmorton Street. And yet somehow he had succeeded in amassing a considerable fortune, his credit in the City was quite above suspicion, and his position was high in Society. These anomalies do occur here and there in commerce, and one can find little reason for the success of such methods of business in the teeth of the modern science of finance and trade.

So Mr. Golding now possessed a handsome house, with its dining-room, library, two drawing-rooms and conservatory, and with plenty of bedrooms for his numerous old friends and relations; for he was a hospitable man was old Mr. Golding—hospitality was another of his rococo principles. His eldest daughter, Barbara, was the wife of the junior partner in an eminent firm of city solicitors, a Mr. Henry Hatton. Mrs. Hatton had, like the person in the Scriptures, begged that the major portion of her fortune might be handed to her as her dowry, on condition that the money remained in the bank. She was in reality a sort of junior partner in the bank, for she had always assisted her father in his business affairs; she was a thorough woman of business, and continued after her marriage to have great influence not only in her father's bank, but in his household. Though Mr. and Mrs. Hatton had a house at Forest Hill, they lived a great deal in her father's house, for the old man liked to have his family around him, with a fresh and gradually increasing brood of grandchildren. The young couple were to arrive in a few days to spend, as usual, the height of the season at Park House, but at present the family circle consisted only of Mr. and Mrs. Golding and Lucy.

Lucy, it must be admitted, was her father's real darling. Barbara was, so to speak, the darling of his head, Lucy of his heart. Lucy had been born in the first days of his prosperity, when the toughest part of the struggle for wealth had been overcome; she was his good fortune, his beauty, his ideal of a daughter. For the matter of that, she was the favourite of the whole household, from the faithful old butler who had grown to years of discretion and married in the family, down to the latest kitchen-maid imported by Mrs. Barbara.

Lucy was young and pretty, you see, eight years younger than her sister, and gentle and kind to every one; while Barbara was rather strict and an economist in the house.

Therefore it was that old Robert the butler was lingering about the hall on this morning, for he always liked to see Miss Lucy go off to a ball, or a dinner party, or a ride. Two other personages were also in waiting, to wit a greyhound, lying in the attitude of a Nineveh lion on the mat by the dining-room door, and a black retriever, basking in the rays of the sun, which gave him a coat of many colours through the medium of the porch window.

Presently the queen of the house came down the broad, carpeted stairs, with her dainty little

hat on, holding up daintily her riding habit, and with her gold-headed whip in hand—a perfect picture of maidenhood ; her delicately fresh cheeks not yet blighted by the fetid air of ball-rooms, and her innocent blue eyes unconscious of all the evil of this old world.

The greyhound rose to greet her, putting his aristocratic nose into her hand, and the retriever raised his head, winked at her with his pensive brown eyes, and rapped on the marble floor with his tail in token of approval.

“Robert, is not Mr. Fipps come yet?”

“No, Miss Lucy ; I’m sure I can’t think what he can be doing to be so late,” answered Robert, inwardly considering Fipps a young fool to miss such a sight of his ladylove.

“I had better not wait for him, had I ? I shall be keeping the horses waiting, and we shall lose the best of the morning.”

“Yes, Miss Lucy.” And the butler went and opened the door, while the retriever deferentially made way.

“No, Rollo, you mustn’t come with us now ; we’ll go a walk together this afternoon, will that suit you, old dog ?” she said, patting his smooth head, while the dog blinked an affirmative to the proposal.

Then she tripped down the steps, the groom

dismounted to hold her horse, and the old butler helped her to mount, holding her dainty foot—verily a post of honour. While the ceremony of getting on horseback was going on, Mrs. Golding came to the door, moved by a motherly anxiety to see her pet ride off safely, and the two dogs stood by, the one motionless, the other wagging his tail.

“Where is Gus?” asked Mrs. Golding.

“He has not put in an appearance, so I am punishing him by leaving him behind. Will you tell him he will find me in the Row? I shall canter up and down there till he comes.” So saying she gave her horse the gentlest of touches with her riding-whip, and trotted off, followed by the groom, while the group on the steps stood looking at the pretty horse and rider till they disappeared round the corner of the house.

The park certainly looked better when ornamented with the young beauty of Miss Lucy in her neat habit. The great chestnut trees had an air of dignified satisfaction as their broad leaves rustled in the morning breeze, and the old elms lazily waved their boughs, apparently in token of greeting as she cantered by.

I am afraid Miss Lucy disregarded the homage of the old trees. I am sure she did not

mean to hurt their feelings, but she was thinking of something else at the time, and she allowed her gallant bay to slacken his pace to a gentle trot while she enjoyed the luxury of solitary thought.

Far be it from us to pry into the secrets of maiden meditation, fancy free : let them remain pure and untouched as long as possible. For Heaven's sake, let us keep up the belief that some girls are pure, and a few chaste women yet unbought and unsold, even if the creed seem to be a delusion.

So Miss Lucy rode on almost mechanically, and presently turned into Rotten Row, along which she let her horse trot quietly, while she looked neither to right nor to left, but was apparently absorbed in the limited view before her. Now it happened that the ground of Rotten Row, never in the best of conditions perhaps, had been made worse than usual by the recent heavy rain, so that the horse, trotting along of his own accord, suddenly put his foot in a hole and stumbled on to his knees, Miss Lucy being thereby jerked out of the saddle and thrown to the ground, where she lay stunned by the fall. The groom instantly rode up to her assistance, but he was anticipated by a horseman who was coming up at a fast trot, and who

spurred on his horse, then reined him in so suddenly as to throw him on his haunches, and sprang to the ground. In a minute he was kneeling on the earth by Lucy's side, had taken off her crushed hat and, supporting her head on his knee, was chafing one of her hands in his own.

"Take off the other glove," he said to the groom who had dismounted, "and rub her hand."

This was done, but she still remained with closed eyes, unconscious; so the man changed his tactics.

"Here, hold her head up a moment," he said, then divested himself of his coat, made a pillow of it, and ran off to the neighbouring Serpentine. He ran like a deer, and soon returned carrying his hat dripping full of water in his hands. He found the patient had now opened her eyes and was trying to speak.

He dipped his handkerchief in the water and bathed her head and temples. This remedy seemed to revive her, and she feebly declared that she felt better.

"Do you feel any pain anywhere?" the first arrival asked.

"Only in my head and shoulder—left shoulder."

He lifted her arm and bent the elbow, then examined the shoulder.

"There is nothing broken, luckily," he said.

"Shall I get a surgeon?" proposed one of the bystanders.

"I think we had better get her home as soon as possible," the first man observed.

"Yes," said Lucy, speaking more clearly, "that is best."

"You attend to her, then, while I get a cab," said the man to a lady kneeling by Lucy's side, and he set off again towards Knightsbridge, jumping over any intervening railings like a hurdle-racer. By this time there were a number of riderless horses, and ladies and gentlemen, round the spot, and every one was eagerly offering his or her advice and assistance, while the patient began to feel strong enough to sit up.

Soon a cab was seen driving furiously towards the top of the Row, and the personage who had fetched it came running back. "Now," he said, when he arrived at the spot, "shall I carry you, or do you think you can walk?"

"Oh, I think I can walk," said Lucy; but as soon as they had helped her to stand she turned paler, and tottered.

The energetic man who had conducted all the foregoing operations said never a word, but

took her up in his arms as if she had been a baby. He appeared capable of carrying a burden of twice Lucy's weight; he was a great tall man, with muscular shoulders, and in fact was none other than Count Jagellon, who, like a hero of romance, had opportunely come to the rescue instead of the usual policeman.

"Get on your horse," he said to the groom, "and lead mine along. That's mine," he added, nodding towards a big chestnut.

So saying, he marched off up Rotten Row with his charming burden, and Lucy's head lay quietly against his broad shoulder. Walking straight to the cab, only glancing now and then at the sufferer's face, he placed her ever so gently in it, carefully putting up her feet on one seat, while she lay back in the corner of the cab. Then he said, "If you want anything, just put a hand out of the window. I shall ride by the side of the cab."

"Oh, please don't take so much trouble," she said.

"It is no trouble," he replied; "do as I tell you;" and with that he mounted his horse, and the party proceeded at a slow pace to Mr. Golding's house. Arrived at their destination, the Count dismounted and knocked at the door.

"Miss Golding has had a slight accident," he

explained to Robert when he appeared. "It is nothing serious, just come and help her into the house"

"Oh Lord!" gasped out the butler as he walked slowly down to the cab.

Together he and the Count helped Lucy up the steps and into the library, where they laid her faint and sick on the sofa. Then the two men left the room, the butler ran to Mrs. Golding, and the Count went for the doctor.

Left to the motherly care of Mrs. Golding, Lucy soon began to feel better, and when Doctor Legge arrived (and he came as fast as his bandy legs would permit him), with a frown on his face, he soon relaxed the severity of his countenance, declared there was not much harm done, she must keep very quiet, etc., etc. Then he lingered to learn all about the accident, and at last went away with a promise to return in the evening to have another look at the patient.

As soon as he was gone, "Mamma," said Lucy, "is that gentleman gone? Do please see, and thank him for all his kindness, if he is here."

Mrs. Golding went and inquired of the butler, and was informed that the Count went away to fetch the doctor.

"Oh, I *am* sorry," Lucy exclaimed when she

heard this. "He will think us so ungrateful. But I know who he is."

"Who, dearest?"

"His name is Count Jagellon. I saw him at Baroness Rosencranz's ball; Gus told me his name. He must call on him to thank him for us. No, I think papa had better do it—don't you think so, mamma dear?"

So she prattled on, and told all about the catastrophe, and how the big Count had helped her, and had brought water to bathe her head. After a little time she lay silent. From where she lay by the window she could see the riders cantering round the park, and she watched them all pass, hoping to see one figure again, but that figure did not appear. Instead, she saw Gus ride slowly past, and when she caught sight of him she turned her face from the window and looked at her mother plying her crochet needle by the sofa side.

"By Jove!" said Gus, as he came in with a faint expression of concern on his innocent face, "I am so sorry; are you better?"

"Oh, I am quite well now, thank you."

She had turned to the window and was fidgeting with her foot on the sofa.

Gus came and stood near her and looked down at the delicate pale face, perhaps more beautiful

in its paleness, and now turned away from him.

As he stood there watching her, a feeling of self-condemnation entered his mind. Had he behaved well to this delicate young girl, who was soon to be confided to him? Did he take enough care of her? Did he love her enough?

"I am so sorry," he repeated; "I cannot think how I missed you. I have been looking all over for you." This sounded like a sort of apology, and perhaps he had better not have made any excuses.

"You were too late," Lucy said quietly; her eyebrows were slightly raised and her eyes looked coldly at him. "You were too late to come with me, and too late to help me, you see." There was the nearest approach to a sneer in her voice that Lucy had ever attained to; as such it pierced deeper than the coldest sneer of a polished man of the world. Gus's face flushed and he hung his head.

"It was all the stableman's fault; he did not send my horse in time," he said.

"Very likely," she answered carelessly. "I dare say it was not your fault."

For the first time in his life Gus felt thoroughly uncomfortable. He stood looking

down at his charming boots and tapping one of them with his riding-whip.

"I am awfully sorry," he said, after a pause. "I hope you'll forgive me."

"Oh, there's nothing to forgive," she answered; "you did not make me fall, and if you had I should not have minded it." The words conveyed several meanings; she would not have resented it in the same circumstances; she did not care what he did; or she would like him better if he did anything so reckless.

But now Mrs. Golding interposed to stay the quarrel from growing worse. "There, Gus, you must take care and be a better boy for the future. Did you not want him to do something, dear, to call on Count—Jagellon, isn't it?"

"Jagellon?" exclaimed Gus, looking at Lucy, whose cheeks were gradually coloured with a delicate blush. She could not help it, and she could not prevent Gus seeing this lovely sign, which sent the faintest pang of jealousy through his heart.

Mrs. Golding related the particulars of the accident, and dwelt on the chivalrous conduct of the Count.

Gus at once offered to go to him with a message, but Lucy put her veto on it. "No," she said, "papa had better go."

"You might let me take a message from you," said Gus.

"Oh no," she answered, "it does not matter; besides, papa will wish to see him."

"Very well," said Gus, ruefully, though he was not sorry to be rid of the mission. Then he went away, saying he would call again later in the day to inquire how she was.

"Why were you so hard on him, dearest?" said her mother. "I do not think he was to blame."

"I did not mean to be hard on him, mamma; but why should he pretend to be sorry when I know he does not care about it?"

She was wrong. All the rest of the day Gus was thinking of her. He called again, as he had said he would, and learnt that Lucy was getting on very well and had gone to bed early; then he went to his club, where he sat all the evening moodily, pretending to read a magazine, but in reality thinking of that pretty sweet girl who was supposed to belong to him.

CHAPTER VI.

COUNT JAGELLON COMES INTO FAVOUR.

I PASS over the general consternation which was diffused among the numerous friends and relations of the Goldings when they heard the news of Lucy's accident, which was spread abroad the very same day, so swiftly does rumour fly in London during the season.

The knocker of the front door was judiciously muffled by old Robert, whereby the family were spared the disturbance that would have been caused by the incessant knocking of ladies and gentlemen and footmen, who came next day to deliver their cards and make polite inquiries.

Only two callers, however, went into the house. The first of these was Mr. Hatton, who instead of going to his office took a cab from Victoria Station and drove to Park House, where he arrived about half-past nine, and was cordially received by his father-in-law, who was evidently much pleased (as Mr., or rather Mrs.,

Hatton intended he should be) by his son-in-law's early visit. In fact the old gentleman, as a mark of his favour, took his son-in-law with him in his brougham to the City.

The other personage who was admitted into the sick house was Count Jagellon himself. Mr. Golding had declared his intention of calling on the Count that very afternoon, and Gus intended meeting him somewhere and saying something to him, but neither event had taken place when the Count, in ignorance of Miss Golding's happy progress towards recovery, and considering it merely polite to make inquiries about her, walked quietly over to Park House in the afternoon.

"I called to inquire how Miss Golding was," he said to Robert, who appeared at the door, and who relaxed the gravity of his countenance into a benignant smile at the sight of this visitor. "Is she better?"

"Much better, my Lord, thank you; will you kindly step inside? Mrs. Golding particular wished to see you in case you called."

Count Jagellon at first expressed a fear of troubling Mrs. Golding, but he was overruled by Robert, at once persuasive and peremptory, and the butler having shown his visitor into the library, proceeded upstairs with a certain

self-satisfied air of triumph, holding the visitor's card in his hand.

He knocked at the door of the boudoir, Lucy's own boudoir, where she was lying down, and stood waiting at the door in a dignified manner.

"My Lord is in the library, 'um," said he, handing the card to Mrs. Golding at the door. He glanced furtively into the room through the half-opened door—glanced at a vision of a girl lying on a sofa in a dressing-gown of battiste trimmed with pink, her feet enshrouded in a soft rug—glanced at the interior of a charming little room with delicate rose-coloured curtains toned down by others of lace, with rosewood work table, with *escritoire*, with modest white paper on the walls, a girl's boudoir, in short—I say he glanced at all this and maintained his dignity.

"Count Jagellon is here, shall I give him any message from you, dear?" said Mrs. Golding, to her daughter.

"Oh, please tell him I am very grateful to him, and that I am much better, and hope to be able to thank him soon myself."

"Yes, dear," and Mrs. Golding went downstairs, followed by the faithful old butler. She went into the library, and holding out her hand

to the Count, "We owe you so many thanks," she began, looking up at the great big man before her.

"I am very much pleased," he said, interrupting her, "at having done you any little service. I hope Miss Golding is better—it was nothing serious, I hope."

"Oh no, she is much better; she is sitting up now in her room," said Mrs. Golding, and she gave him Lucy's message.

"I am sufficiently thanked already," he answered, "and I shall feel quite repaid if she will get well as soon as possible, and let us all have the pleasure of seeing her once more in the Row. She must not be afraid of a first spill, you know—I suppose it is the first time?" he asked.

"Oh dear yes; I shall always be afraid of seeing her on horseback again."

"Ah, there is nothing to fear," he answered; "the best thing is for her to ride with some one at first; it is safer, because it gives one confidence."

They talked for a short time about the affair, standing together, and then he said—"Well, I must not detain you—I am very glad I have been so lucky as to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Golding."

"Then I trust you will continue it," she said. "My husband is going to call at your rooms this afternoon; if he should miss you, will you come and dine with us any evening—we shall always be glad to see you?"

"Certainly," he said; "will you give me the pleasure of seeing you and Miss Golding as soon as she is sufficiently recovered, and perhaps," he added, laughing, "I might give her some hints about riding; I am a steeplechaser, you know."

"Oh, indeed; that will be very nice."

And then he went away, Robert opening the door for him with marked attention, and being rewarded by a "Good day" from the Count, to which he responded by a most polite inclination of his fat old body, and a "Good afternoon, my Lord."

When Mrs. Golding returned to the boudoir she was compelled to enter into a detailed account of what had passed in the library, and all that the Count had said.

"I believe he is a splendid horseman," remarked Lucy, when she had heard the recital. "Jane (her maid) told me that John (the groom) told her he went past him like lightning when I fell, and stopped his horse as if it had been shot, and John said he could see *he* had ridden in a race—so Jane told me. Isn't he a very big

man, mamma? He seemed to me an enormous creature at the time."

"So he is," said her mother; "I should think he must be six feet two at least, and broad in proportion."

"I know he carried me as if I was a little baby—I have a distinct recollection of his striding along without any exertion at all. I suppose I must be rather a light person. I shall get myself weighed as soon as I am well enough. I will make papa buy me a pair of scales."

Mr. Golding did not buy a pair of scales, but having missed the Count that afternoon he did not consider he had done his duty until he had given some tangible proof of his esteem, and in consequence the Count received one day a double-barrelled Westley-Richards, with a note intimating that it was intended as a little keepsake—and if not suitable to the receiver, he should change it for any other weapon he pleased. The Count, however, chose to keep the gun, which was a really fine specimen of workmanship, and about a week afterwards he went to a quiet family dinner at Park House, the party including Mr. and Mrs. Hatton, a senior partner of the former, and Gus. For Lucy by this time was quite competent to take her place at table, and had already been for one or two drives in the

park, and had met her rescuer and blushed and thanked him.

The dinner had *un succès fou*, the Count carried all before him, and far outshone that brilliant young diplomatist, Mr. Fipps. It is only fair to Gus, and to the service generally, to say that he had ever since the accident to his intended been under a cloud. The very day after the event he had been hailed on his entrance into his club by a chorus of, "Hullo, Fipps, what's all this about Miss Golding? tell us all about it; who was the *Deus ex machinâ*?" etc. For the confounded newspapers had got hold of it, and there were paragraphs about the "Serious accident in Rotten Row;" and on Gus giving the choir a short account of it, there was one who said, on hearing that the Count had been equal to the occasion, "Jagellon, was it? I say, Gus, look out for squalls, he's a regular lady-killer, you know;" and "Oh, quite a Don Juan, eh?" from another; and "I say, you will have to use all the diplomacy you know, my boy," with various other forms of chaff, which the horrified Gus was wholly unable to parry. Gus had been most assiduous in his attentions to Lucy, calling every day, and going away satisfied with a word from the butler or Mrs. Golding. He had meekly asked for and

obtained a seat in the carriage when the dear patient took her drive, and had seen that meeting with the hero of the accident, and that tender blush, and those stammered words of thanks, which were laughed off with gallant *insouciance*.

Even Mrs Hatton—a tall lady with smooth dark hair, with the aquiline nose of her father, and firm mouth, all expressive of the staid propriety of the young British matron—even Mrs. Hatton was gracious to the dashing cavalier. Not that poor Gus was snubbed in his turn. He was still a favourite of Mrs. Hatton's, she was always attentive to him, and, besides, old Mr. Golding took all the attentions to his daughter in good part. Lucy herself also was not unkind, she did not seem to dislike him, but she only disregarded him, neither said anything nor behaved otherwise than any young lady would to any ordinary young gentleman. So Gus was under a cloud, and it was the Count who fascinated the company round Mr. Golding's table. Mr. Golding—that grave, hard-faced old gentleman, with his rough complexion, aquiline nose, and well-brushed whiskers, and grizzly hair brushed forwards, a personification of integrity—Mr. Golding softened the hard lines of his face, and bent his shoulders over the table as he listened to his guest.

The conversation over dinner turned on foreign scenes, a subject which was broached by Mrs. Hatton, who doubtless thought it proper to talk about foreign lands to a Count. This Count was certainly at home on the subject. He described various incidents of his travels in France, in Germany, in Spain, in Italy. He was particularly eloquent on Italy. He did not talk about this or that gallery of pictures, or various churches and their frescoes, but about the country itself, and his feelings in different places. "After all," said he, absorbing now the entire conversation, "there is no place like Pompeii. To my mind it is *the* wonder of the world. I don't think much of your great wall of China, or any other wall, or any temple that is only in a degree more wonderful than another temple. But Pompeii defies time and space, and infinity almost; it has completely revolutionized the order of things. You go into a dead city that is alive; it is a couple of thousand years old, and is quite fresh and young."

"Ah," said the host, "I do not recollect the place. Did we not go there, Lucy?"

"No, papa, we were obliged to return from Rome because of mamma's being ill. I should like to see it very much."

"I am certain you would," said the Count,

turning to her and addressing the rest of his description to her. "You cannot think what an odd feeling the place gives you, and what zest it gives to one's imagination. You see the houses just as they were when the inhabitants fled, one thousand eight hundred years ago. There are the meats and drinks they were going to feed on; there are the baths they had just used; there are the causeways worn in places as they are worn now-a-days—in the City, for instance. It is wonderful! If you can only go there on a rainy day, as I once did, when no one else was there, and stand there by yourself, it is easy to fall into a reverie and dream that the city is repeopled, the Forum is again busy, along the ruts of the street rolls the patrician's chariot, and presently comes the rich libertine in his litter, with his summer rings glittering on his fingers. I really fancied them all, and when I left Naples I read again with quite a fresh interest all my Latin authors. Don't you know when you have been to a grand public ceremony you like to read the accounts of it afterwards? That was just my feeling when I read the Roman poets again after Pompeii."

Lucy listened to him with rapt attention. "I should like to see it," she said.

"I am sure you would."

“And are there any works of art to be seen there?” inquired the senior partner.

“There are plenty of objects for any man of taste,” the Count replied. “The houses are beautifully built; the architecture, to my mind, is superior to any of your modern works; the frescoes and pictures and ornaments of the houses and temples are exquisite, and all new, fresh and bright.”

In this way the Count talked about places he had seen, while all the company listened to him and asked him questions, but Lucy more than all the rest did seriously incline to hear his words, and she sighed a gentle sigh when she had to leave the room and such a brilliant talker.

It was a drearily long time to wait in the drawing-room until the gentlemen had finished their wine; and while Mrs. Hatton entered into sundry details concerning her domestic affairs Lucy retired to a corner of the drawing-room, and listlessly looked over some photographs of Italy.

How pleasant was the sound of the deep voices on the stairs and the heavy steps near the door, and the entrance of papa leading the other four into the room! Lucy shut the folio, and inwardly “sighed a sigh, and prayed a prayer,”

which, alas! was wafted away by the summer breeze coming through the window from the Park. It was Gus who came and sat by her, while Jagellon stood talking to the other ladies.

"I say, you are looking quite well again to-night," said Gus to his future wife, and it was about the best thing he said during the whole evening. He was rewarded with a smile.

"Am I?" said Lucy. "I feel so much stronger. I hope papa will not take me to Devonshire, as he said he would. I should so like to go to Italy again."

"Should you? Let us make up a party. I should think it would be as good for you as anything. I'll propose it to the governor."

Their conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Golding calling upon her daughter to sing a song, which duty she performed like the obedient girl she was. She sang a simple ditty of the prevailing school of music, and was rewarded by the praises of Count Jagellon, who came to the piano to thank her. Lucy, Gus, and the Count stayed by the piano, talking about music, while the rest unconcernedly talked together principally about each other's business, for it is the nature of man to talk his own "shop." Lucy, finding that Jagellon was quite learned in musical matters, presently asked him to play or

sing something, and was backed up by Gus, who involuntarily declared that the other was great at music.

The Count consented on condition that Miss Golding should sing another song in return, and this being granted, he sat down to the piano and ran his hands over the keys. After thinking a moment, he began singing Schubert's "Who is Sylvia?"

When he began his voice was low, as if he was hesitating about it, and in the first and second verses there was a plaintive tone in his voice; but the last verse he sang with more force, so that every one seemed to be enchanted by his singing, so silent and attentive were they. When he finished, a murmured "Oh!" was heard from every one, and then exclamations of "How charming! how very sweet!" and, "Never heard anything I liked so well," from Mr. Golding.

An encore was unanimously asked for, but the Count declined, on the ground that a *réchauffé* was never good, and declared that it was Miss Golding's turn.

But she pleaded that he would excuse her, and he gallantly waived his claim.

Then he played a nocturne of Chopin's, and then various other little pieces, with all of which the company expressed themselves entirely

delighted. It was a curious trait in this man's character that, though in general gay and brilliant in his ways, there was always a tone of subdued sadness in the music he played, and even now and then the same thing occurred in a phrase or a word he uttered.

Well, all pleasant things come to an end; the occasional bits of sunshine are soon overcast by the monotonous clouds of life, and so the evening came to an end, and Lucy had to say good-bye to one of the pleasantest incidents of her pleasant little life. And after the visitors had gone and the family, with yawns, had retired to rest at a virtuously early hour to prepare for the toil of the morrow, it is possible that Lucy sat down for a little while to think over the past evening, to recall some phrase, to recollect and treasure up some pleasant impression of so agreeable a party. But we have no information on the subject, and if we could obtain any, it is just as well not to satisfy our curiosity.

CHAPTER VII.

A VISIT.

IF Lucy felt somewhat dull on the day following the little dinner party, she was agreeably excited by an incident which occurred during the afternoon.

For the knocker of the front door having been by this time unmuffled, a sharp rap at the door echoed over the house, with the result of a card being delivered to Mrs. Golding bearing the name of "La Comtesse Théodora Woronzow," accompanied by a verbal message to the effect that the Countess hoped Miss Golding had recovered from her accident, of which the Countess had only been informed on her return to town the previous day.

Whereupon Lucy determined to answer Madame de Woronzow's inquiries *in propria personá*, and as the assiduous Gus arrived the next day just as she was setting off, he also made one of the party, together with Mrs. Hatton, who, it was arranged, was to set the young

couple down at Madame de Woronzow's and drive on by herself to do some shopping in the neighbourhood.

Rose Lodge, the London residence of the Countess Woronzow, is by many considered the prettiest villa in Tyburnia. Its chief excellence consists in an exclusiveness which is produced by the high wall shutting out the inquisitive street.

There are but two entrances to the house, thus secluded; a door in the wall (always kept locked) for the use of tradesmen and servants; and the main entrance, a strong oaken door opening on a long gallery with walls of painted glass.

As to the house itself, the chief beauty of it is the magnificent bay-window of the drawing-room, round which creeps a luxuriant growth of jasmine. This room takes up all the ground floor of the house on one side of the porch, the other contains a snug dining-room and a morning-room or library. The premises in which the house stands are about an acre in extent, and consist at the back of a large garden, which is screened from the view of some gigantic, ugly mansions by a number of trees at the further end, laburnums and sycamores, and a weeping willow, under the shade of

which are one or two charming little arbours, cool and shady. In the front garden there are two luxuriant beds of roses, from which, doubtless, the villa derives its name.

Lucy and Gus were ushered by the foreign-looking footman in black, along the gallery and into the drawing-room, where they found Madame de Woronzow. She was dressed in plain black, a costume which, as it fitted her perfectly, served to enhance the beauty of her figure, instead of giving a sombre cast to her appearance.

A white frill surrounded her throat without wholly concealing the beauties thereof, and as a sole ornament she wore a damask rosebud in the bosom of her dress. The furniture of the room, the chairs, and a causeuse covered with satin of *bleu tendre*, and the delicately coloured walls on which hung some tasteful water-colours—these served as a background to her severe beauty, while the bright sunshine peeping through the lace curtains of the great bay-window, sparkled in her hair and glanced over her lovely face. Lucy, in her pretty youthful hat ornamented with lace and flowers, and her fresh, cream-coloured dress trimmed with dark blue, had a feeling, at first, of timidity in the presence of this grand woman.

"Gus, you sit down there," said Madame, pointing to a chair opposite, "and now we can talk comfortably. And you are quite recovered, are you? I must say you look none the worse for your escapade."

"Oh no, I am quite well now; I only felt very much shaken for a day or two."

"And how did it all happen? Tell me all about it from beginning to end."

So Lucy began the story of her adventure, and when she came to tell how Count Jagellon rescued her from her painful position, the Countess said, "Count Jagellon? I seem to know the name."

"Oh yes," broke in Gus, "didn't you see him at the Rosencranz ball?"

"Ah, I remember now; he gallantly lent me his cab."

"And got wet through," added Gus.

"Yes," she said laughing; "and I have never yet thanked him properly for his services. He is a most useful man, really. And so he gave you his assistance?"

"Oh, and he was so kind, you cannot think," said Lucy; "he brought me to, and bathed my head with water. Then he got a cab for me, and carried me to it and rode all the way back on his horse. He did take so much trouble for

me, I have never been able to thank him for it as much as I wished."

"He must be a very good fellow," remarked Madame.

"Oh, he is, and very clever too, I believe. Papa asked him to dinner, and he gave us a description of the countries he had travelled in. Papa says he is one of the cleverest men he ever met."

"Really I must make his acquaintance; I like clever people," said the Countess. "And where were you all this time?" she asked, turning to Gus.

"Oh," he said, "I only came in after it was all over."

"That comes of your being so lazy. You don't scold him half enough," she said to Lucy; "I will show you how. Now mind, sir, if you ever miss such an opportunity again I shall cut you. What! after all the training you have had from me, to behave like that! There," she added, suddenly turning to Lucy, "that's the way to talk to him. You see how orderly it makes him look."

Gus laughed, and swore he would bring in a Reform Bill on his own account. But Madame saying she was going to punish him, told him she wanted him to go away and leave them to a quiet chat together. Which command Gus dutifully obeyed. As he was going Madame said,

"Are you going to Ascot to-morrow? It's the Cup day, is it not?"

"Yes," he answered, "I am going with Lord Thryburgh's party. Jagellon will be there, so he told me; shall I give him any message?"

"Yes, tell him I am very grateful to him for his services—to myself and to Lucy."

"All right," he said, and left the room.

"He's a good little fellow after all, is not he, Lucy?" said Madame as soon as Gus had gone.

"Yes."

"Ah, come now, there's a 'yes' which sounds dubious."

"But really I think he is nice, only——"

"Only he is not everything one could wish; he is not one's idea of perfection—isn't that it?"

"I don't know," said Lucy with a little sigh.

"Well, my dear, you might know many more people without finding one better than little Gus."

"Oh yes; but supposing one did?"

"Did what?"

"Find some one that was, well—better, as you say."

"Well, then I should criticize that person, and make sure that he was really better, and that his superiority was not all outward show."

"Ah, but it is hard to criticize, and—and then you cannot help favouring the one you like best."

“You do not dislike your engagement, do you, dear?” asked the Countess.

“Oh dear no, but sometimes I feel as if I did not like him well enough; and then, you know, he does not care much for me.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Do you think he does care for me? He seemed very sorry when I was hurt, but it was in a conventional sort of way, as if he thought it was the correct thing to be sorry.”

“He may love you more than you think, and I believe he would be terribly cut up if he really lost you. You must remember, dear, that you are bound to him—you have given your word to him.”

“Yes, I know it must be, and it is no use thinking about it.”

She said this so sadly, and in such a despairing tone, that the Countess remained silent, looking at her. She was going to reply to this little speech when they were interrupted by the arrival of the carriage, and Lucy had to go.

“Now remember, my dear,” said Madame at parting, “you must reckon on me as your friend; and, trust me, I will do anything for you that you wish.”

“Oh yes. I wish I could always talk to you and say what I think.”

“So you can ; you can come here as often as you please. Come in the morning and you will always find me at home, and write to me when you cannot see me.”

“Oh, thank you so much.” And then they kissed, and Lucy went to the carriage.

When she was alone Madame Woronzow sat down to think about her friend. She was already very fond of her, and interested in her fresh young mind. She saw there was a shadow between her and Gus ; she knew by what name to call that shadow and who caused it ; but she dared not utter the name even to herself.

She walked to the window and stood there gazing unconsciously at the rosebeds below, at the warm colours of the red roses.

What was this new love tale, that she had guessed at ? A young romance, a mutual passion ? Or an airy bubble, a fancy of the hour, to disappear, leaving only bitter tears as the remains of its glowing colours ? Was it not probably so ? She would herself prove whether it were so or not, and then act as she thought best for her friend, not for herself.

With this resolve she rang the bell for her servant.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND MEETING.

MADAME WORONZOW's servant Peter stood at the door of the house where Count Jagellon lodged and rang the bell. The door was opened by Watkins.

"Hallo ! Peter What's-yer-name, it's you, is it ? How's yourself ?"

"Very well. Is milord at home ?"

"No, he ain't ; he's at his club, I reckon. Any message for him ? If it's anything in the confidential line, eh ? p'raps you'd better write it down."

"Oh *non*. Will he be in soon ?"

"Oh, it's something express, is it ? Electric Telegraph's a fool to it. Look here, you just give it to me. I know where to find him."

"Where ?"

At this remarkably innocent question the two valets looked at each other, Watkins with one eye closed, Peter with a child-like innocence of expression. They were no bad examples of the

modern Scapin — Watkins, a Yorkshireman, with a Yorkshireman's shrewdness, capable of all the jockey tricks of a tyke; Peter, a Pole, with an intuitive knowledge of men and women, and with a love of intrigue and secrecy. The one a short, square-shouldered, bullet-headed man, with two straight locks of hair over his ears, with little whiskers, clean-shaven chin, turned-up nose, sharpened at the end, and wide mouth, and a generally horsey appearance. The other had short-cropped dark hair, blue chin, sharp black eyes, and a small mouth; a slender, dapper man in his black livery. They both had one thing in common—their fidelity to their master and mistress.

"Now, Peter, no games. I tell yer I don't know where master is, but I can find him."

"At his club?" inquired Peter.

"At his club, p'raps," repeated the other.

"Dining perhaps?"

"It is very possible; so you step inside and give us your message."

"No, I thank you, I must return immediately."

"Very well. What's the news? Missis come back?"

This was uttered in a very indifferent tone, the speaker gazing at the opposite house.

“Why, don’t you want her to come back?”

“No, I don’t, ’cause he’ll be wanting to go and call on her instead o’ going down to Ascot as he says he was, and giving me a bit of an outing. No, I’m blowed if I want your missis back just to-morrow.”

“Why not tell him after to-morrow?” suggested the Pole.

“Not at no price. I should lose by it, Peter, d’yer see. I tell you I must let him know immediate.”

“Very well, you tell him Madame returned on Monday.”

“On Monday?”

“Yes, and I could not let him know before—do you understand?”

They looked at one another again. Then Watkins nodded his head on one side.

“I ain’t a walking hospital for the blind,” said he; “you’ll just come in and have a glass of wine while I am a-putting on my coat?”

But Peter declined the offer; he must not stay, he repeated, and he went away; promising, however, to make a party with Watkins on some future occasion.

It will be seen from the foregoing interview that Watkins had already made the acquaintance of Countess Woronzow’s servant, acting on the

instructions of his master. The Count was dining at his club when his servant was announced, and he went out into the hall to see Watkins.

The conversation between them was of a laconic nature.

"She is in town, my Lord."

"Good."

"He says she came back on Monday, but, says he, he couldn't let you know before."

"Oh, ah! couldn't let me know."

"No, my Lord."

"Wait a moment, I will give you a note for Mr. Hudson."

The Count went into the library of the club, and wrote a note to the gentleman he mentioned, with whom he had appointed to travel down to Ascot the next day. He wrote to say that sudden family business prevented him going to Ascot. So Watkins was deprived of his "outing."

On the afternoon, therefore, of the following day, the Count drove to Yorkshire Terrace in his cab. Watkins was observed by a servant-maid, who happened to be looking out of a neighbouring window, to wink one eye hard at his horse's head, when Jagellon sprang into his cab. The wink, being interpreted, meant that

Watkins understood from his master's appearance that he "meant business." The Count, in fact, was dressed with the utmost care; his glossy hat had been but recently purchased, after the spoiling of the last one in the Serpentine; his tie was quite new, and of the latest fashion; his coat was buttoned closely round his broad chest, and showed forth the symmetry of his figure, and the strength in his shoulders; his gloves were of the colour of the primrose, and even his moustaches had been carefully brushed and twirled upwards with precision. Altogether the Count looked, as he has been described to us, "a regular Don Juan."

The brightly-polished cab drove up to the door of Rose Lodge, and Don Juan sprang out and knocked like a good Christian, in the hope that the said door would be opened, and in a short time this took place and Peter appeared.

Madame de Woronzow was at home, and the Count walked up the porch for the first time. He was in the enchanted castle—enchanting to him; and as he walked slowly up the long porch into the hall he noted with interest all the details of the place, looking probably for some objects which would remind him of the woman in the dove-grey cloak with a rose in

her black hair, whom he had led through the Hall of Mecklenburgh House that night. All was perfectly still in the castle save the soft sound of the two men's feet on the carpet, and Peter's step was almost inaudible; the Count only heard his own bolder footsteps.

The hall, dimly lighted from the porch and by a window and a glass door leading into the garden at the back, was almost in darkness to any one coming out of the sunshine, and it had a delicious air of mystery about it—at least so it felt to Jagellon.

Peter opened a white-and-gold painted door on the left, and ushered the visitor into the drawing-room. Here everything reminded him of the dove-grey cloak; the tender colouring of the walls, the grey tints in a water-colour opposite him, the light blue of the furniture, and a porcelain vase filled with roses which stood on a tripod inside the window.

A delicious warmth pervaded the room, a warmth scented by the scent of the roses, and there was to Jagellon's mind a feeling of sadness in the room, like a look of tenderness in a woman's eyes; a feeling as if there was a presence wanting, without which the room was desolate.

The Count's quick ear catches the sound of

the sweeping of a woman's dress, the door opens noiselessly, and, in startling contrast to the light colours of the room, a figure in black appears, a beautiful dark woman in a severe black silk dress—nothing but black except a lace collar round the throat, and a gold locket hung round her neck. But more terrible than the severity of her dress is the aspect of her face; her red upper lip is curved in two haughty arches, and her eyes look at her visitor with proud civility.

Jagellon was a brave man in his way, but he felt that it required some nerve to face the splendid woman before him. He began by saying he had heard quite by accident of her arrival in town and hastened to call, "as you wished me to do so," he said, simply. This was his trump card, and he played it as a player at Napoleon—she had *asked* him to come and see her.

"I scarcely expected to see you to-day, or any one else. I thought the world had gone to Ascot for the week, and that I should, at least to day, have a quiet rest."

Though this sounded like a *congé*, she motioned him to a chair, while she seated herself in a *causeuse*, in which position she was at a lower level than he, and could look up at him

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or lean back and examine him under her eyelids. The Count seated himself, feeling at the same time that he was rather a bore.

"Please do not let me intrude upon you," said he; "you see I do not yet know on what days you receive."

"Oh, it is of no consequence," she answered. "I wanted to say something to you. And in the first place would you oblige me by not bribing my servants."

"The devil!" thought Jagellon, "that's what she's offended at, is it?"

"You will gain nothing by it," she went on; "my servants always inform me of any bribe that is offered them."

"I suppose you mean the sovereign I gave to your servant?" inquired Jagellon.

"Yes."

"Allow me to explain it. I called here the day after I had the pleasure of serving you, as you told me to do so, and unfortunately found you were not at home——"

"I was unavoidably obliged to leave home," she said.

"So your servant informed me the next day, and as I feared you might think me remiss if I did not call on you when you returned, I requested your servant to let me know when

I could see you, and I simply paid him for his trouble. I regret having offended against any rule——”

“It does not much matter in the present case, but please do not repeat it. And allow me to hand you back your money.”

So saying, she coolly took a sovereign out of a purse that she held in her hand and presented it to him. But Jagellon objected.

“No,” said he, “excuse me, I cannot take back money I have once given. Besides, your servant did me the service for which I gave him the money; it was he told me you were in town.”

“I know,” she answered quietly. “I have not taken the money from my servant, but you have simply made me increase his wages by this amount.”

The Count instantly saw his opportunity. “If you give me this,” he said, “I accept it with pleasure,” and he held out his gloved hand.

For a second she hesitated to put it into his hand, then she gave him the coin, shut up her purse, and laid it on a table.

But Jagellon took out his card-case (he did not usually carry a purse), undid the gold clasp, and carefully put the piece of money inside, and

as carefully returned the case to his breast-pocket.

The most ingenuous school-girl would probably have understood by his action that he meant to keep the coin, not for its intrinsic value, but because it was her first gift to him. She understood it well enough; she was inwardly laughing at his cleverness—but was this play, or was it earnest? He had repelled her first attack, and so, like a skilful general, she changed her tactics. When she spoke again her voice was soft and pleasant.

“Having performed this disagreeable task, I have now to thank you for your kindness to myself, and I was pleased to hear, too, that you had been so good to Miss Golding, who is my newest friend.”

“Ah, I did not know you were acquainted,” he said.

“I have only known her a week or so, but she is already a particular friend of mine.”

“Oh, indeed! She is engaged to Fipps, is she not? You know Fipps, I know.”

“How do you know?” she asked.

“Why,” he answered laughing, “I asked him if he knew you; he knows everybody, I believe, and he told me all about you.”

"And may I ask what sort of character he gave me?" she asked, smiling.

"Well, rather an extraordinary one."

"Dear me, did he make me out to be such a very terrible person?"

She asked this quite pleasantly, as if it was a mere joke, but in reality she was much surprised, and intensely anxious to know what Gus had said.

"I am afraid you would be offended if I was to tell you," he said, laughing still. (She just arched her eyebrows.) "He gave me the idea that you were a species of state conspirator."

"A conspirator?" laughing.

"Yes; he has an ingenious theory that you are hand-in-hand with that man Bagrathion."

"Bagrathion!" she thought. "This is worse and worse."

"Gus," he went on, "has always some wild theory about Bagrathion and revolutionists in general. I should like to know what that man really is—you know him, do you not?"

"Yes," she said frankly, though she was almost trembling, "I often see him."

"Is he a Pole?"

"Oh no, he is a Russian by birth. I believe he belongs to the party of Slavophiles, as they are called."

"But is he not in league with some Polish patriots?"

"What is this man driving at?" she thought.

"Why do you think so?" she asked.

Then he related his meeting with the personage calling himself Mr. Mentzel, saying, in conclusion, that Mr. Mentzel confessed himself to be a Polish rebel, and that he knew General Bagrathion and herself.

"Yes," she answered, "I know him; he is my countryman."

"I also am a Pole," said Jagellon gently.

"You!" she answered, suddenly turning her flashing eyes upon him,—*"You! No, you have the good fortune to be an Englishman. When have you suffered for your country? when have you been thrown into prison, or driven from the field of battle, a vagabond over the world, hunted down by police, and watched by spies? No, no, you are rich and happy; you can go where you like and be respected. A Pole is a man who in his own land lives in constant fear of transportation to the horrible wilds of Siberia, or who is an exile amongst strangers, poor and forced to work for his bread amongst suspicious enemies, without a family, often without friends, and utterly without hope of*

ever obtaining what he longs for. *You* are no Pole !”

The last words were uttered in a tone of indescribable scorn ; there was such a light in her eyes as she spoke that Jagellon involuntarily lowered his own, and looked at the carpet. There was a momentary silence, then Jagellon said in a low voice—

“You are rather hard on me ; you forget that I also have no father to tell me what is my duty in life.”

Again a silence, while the silvery tones of an ebony timepiece were heard striking the hour—five o’clock.

“Perhaps I am hard on you,” she said softly ; “I forgot you were an orphan. It is not your fault.”

“You are not only hard, but you are unjust.” (She looked up at him.) “For you, yourself, know how I can be a true son of my father, and you will not tell me.”

There was the tone of sadness in his voice, which he sometimes had, and which to most women had an almost irresistible charm. This woman was perhaps not insensible to it ; her face became more tender in its expression, but——

“No,” she said, “you must find it out for

yourself; I cannot teach you; you want to have all the trouble of life taken away, and your way made plain before you—that is laziness.”

“Tell me, at least, what I ought to do, and I will do it,” he said.

“It is not for me to say. Think, and you will be able to see your duty, perhaps.”

“Ah, you are cruel; are all my countrymen so? You are the first, to my knowledge, that I have talked with, and you will have nothing to say to me—is that right?”

“What do you want to know?” she asked after a pause.

“I want to know what you think. Give me an example to follow.”

“I will think of it. Mind, it is at your own risk; you must not blame me if you suffer for the knowledge.”

“Cost what it may, I do not care.” Then he rose—“Only tell me how I may be worthy of my country.”

“Very well, I will see about it.”

“When shall I see you again—to-morrow?”

“No, not to-morrow.”

“Well, Saturday then?”

“No, you need not come on Saturday; I

always receive people on Saturday. Come on Sunday or Monday."

"Sunday then, and you will be at home on that day?"

"Yes."

"Really?"

"Yes," she said, laughing, "*parole d'honneur*; is that enough for you?"

"Thanks, yes." Then he took her hand, and bent and kissed it gently, gallantly. "Good-bye!" he said, and left the room.

She stood still just as he had left her. Her face was more beautiful by reason of a blush which overspread her soft cheeks. She stood with her head bent looking at her hand, on which she still felt the light pressure of his lips, and the brushing of his silky moustache on the soft skin.

Her first thought was that she had been defeated; her resolutions had been broken, and she had promised to see him again to teach him what she thought was great and noble, that he might follow it.

But in the thought of her defeat there was a "secret sweetness." To be conquered is a woman's victory. She had consented to be his friend, and she had yielded to him when he asked to see her again. She, whose opinion was

sought by some of the clever men in Europe, was worsted by this gay and frivolous man, who passed his time in gambling and running after women.

She sat down again on the *causeuse*, her hands clasped on her knees, feeling humiliated and perplexed. Into what a labyrinth was she wandering? Bagrathion, Fipps, Lucy, Jagellon—what a medley! And she was the centre of this medley, and was growing powerless to guide herself through it.

“Would to Heaven,” she said to herself, “that I had never gone to that ball, or had never met him, or, or——” she could not finish the thought. She began to feel reckless; she almost resolved to abandon herself to fate.

Then she roused herself; she began to walk to and fro in the room.

She thought of Mr. Mentzel; she had forgotten that it was not merely herself that depended on her conduct, but perhaps the lives and freedom of others. And what were her feelings and wishes compared to the great Cause of freedom? What! was she inferior to others, the commonest patriot who sacrificed himself and the good things of this world for liberty’s sake?

She also would sacrifice herself—*she* would give up more than all the rest—would, if it must be so, “throw away a pearl richer than all her tribe,” in secret, unknown, and unrecorded by fame

CHAPTER IX.

IMPROVING ACQUAINTANCE.

THE church bells had rung in their customary irritating manner during the morning of the following Sunday; they had all given out their not uncertain sound, from the tom-tom of the bell in the turret of the exquisitely ugly old edifice—supposed to be emblematic as to its architecture of the reign of the Georges—to the tang of the impudent bell in the iron-built conventicle which formed a place of worship for some select body of Dissenters-from-every-one-else. Church-goers may be divided in London into three distinct classes—the respectable people who attend in the morning; the fashionably lazy people, who go in the afternoon; and the fanatics, who go probably for the second time in the evening. But Madame Woronzow did not belong to any of these classes. As in most things, so in church duties, she was an exception; she went to Mass, generally at the Polish Chapel, about nine o'clock in the morning, and

having thus performed her duty she occupied herself for the rest of the day as she thought fit; that is to say, she went on very much the same as on any other day of the week. On this particular Sunday afternoon she had nestled herself down in the cushions of the sofa in her boudoir, and was reading a volume of Victor Hugo's works. For she was expecting one or two visitors to call upon her that afternoon, first and foremost of whom was Miss Lucy Golding. Madame Woronzow had on the previous Friday, that is to say the day after she had seen Jagellon, made a formal call on Mrs. Golding, and had been very cordially received by the family.

Mrs. Golding herself was quite ready to welcome any one who took an interest in Lucy; and as to Mrs. Hatton, she ran after a title as naturally as a dog comes when you whistle for him. It was not snobbery or affectation in her, it was nature, it was born in her; and no amount of scandal could have lessened her veneration for titled nobility. She cultivated the acquaintance of such people with a sort of ladylike ease and persistency that had a sort of subtle flattery in it, and it was in no small degree owing to this useful gift that she succeeded so well in society. Ladies of high rank

said of her that she exactly knew her position. "Mrs. Hatton," they would say, "is rather a common sort of person, but she *is* a lady, one can see that; she is not pretty, it is true, but then she is nice and does not give herself airs." And so Mrs. Henry Hatton was in the good graces of numbers of great ladies, and was received everywhere, yea, even in the highest circles, to her own advantage, and indirectly to her husband's as well. Therefore Mrs. Hatton set herself in her gracefully obsequious way to win over Countess Woronzow, and that for several reasons, only one of which was of a distinctly selfish nature, to give Mrs. Hatton her due. For, first of all, dear Lucy, if she got on with the Countess, would be introduced to quite a new society, distinct from Mrs. Hatton's set; secondly, such society being to some extent of a diplomatic and political sort, would be useful to Gus and his wife on their marriage, especially if, as they (the Goldings) hoped, he should be appointed to St. Petersburg, where, doubtless (so Mrs. Hatton argued), Monsieur le Comte would get him on. In addition, Madame Woronzow might be of considerable use to Mrs. Hatton herself by giving her an introduction into continental society. Therefore, I say, Mrs. Hatton put on her best manner

when the Countess called, and she showed a quite sisterly affection for Lucy before her visitor, by which policy she succeeded in producing a not unfavourable impression on the Countess.

It is true that Mrs. Hatton knew that Madame Woronzow held certain peculiar opinions, which appeared to her (Mrs. Hatton) to be subversive of law and order, and in the course of conversation the Countess made fun of an eminent English diplomatist—a proceeding which rather shocked Mrs. Hatton; but then she believed unconsciously in the principle enunciated by an ancient writer, that certain expressions are only choleric words when uttered by a lord, for instance. So Mrs. Hatton held her peace and smiled at the Countess's description of the eminent diplomatist—and the visit passed off pleasantly enough. Madame Woronzow hoped to have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Golding and Mrs. Hatton again very soon (which the latter lady interpreted to mean that they would be asked to the Countess's garden party the week after next), and she asked that Lucy might come and see her on Sunday afternoon. And afterwards, Barbara, Mrs. Hatton, preached Lucy a long sermon on the text of Countess Woronzow, to which Lucy naïvely

replied that she liked Madame excessively, and should be glad to know her always.

So on this Sunday afternoon, when London was so deliciously silent with the silence of the English sabbath, only broken by a sleepy church bell that sounded as if it had partaken too largely of an early dinner, Miss Lucy demurely walked over to Rose Lodge and was admitted into the *sanctum sanctorum* of the house—the Countess's boudoir.

There are one or two of the best men—"swells" as they were then called—who have been admitted therein, and have had the honour of drinking Russian tea out of expensive china cups in the Countess's pet room. When these highly favoured ones hear another member of the *jeunesse dorée* unctuously describing in their clubs certain chambers where they have been, they ask, "Have you been to Countess Woronzow's boudoir?" and on the inevitable reply in the negative, say, "Ah, wait till you have been there, my friend!"

And then perhaps some old gentleman of very high rank in the world, having caught the words while he is perusing the *Times*, with his hat on the back of his head, will settle the matter by remarking, "Yes, a pretty room—very pretty indeed!"

Madame's boudoir has been described by an enthusiastic man as like a blush-rose full blown on a summer's morning. That was the prevailing colour, a beautiful rose-red; the walls papered with a dusky red colour, like the inside of the petals of a damask rose, a carpet of roses, the covering of the sofa, &c., of a delicate rose colour, and the curtains of rose satin. Everywhere a *teint de roses*. There were few complexions able to exist in the room, but it suited best of all the Countess's rich beauty. Lucy looked the delicatest of blondes amidst the warm colours. The Countess made her come and sit on the sofa—a real sofa, on which two or three people could sit or lie, with large cushions, at once soft and solid.

Lucy had divested herself of her bonnet, and sat by her companion's side, cosily chatting with her friend on all sorts of subjects, from abstract marriage to the newest fashions in bonnets—on all those subjects, in fact, about which women converse when they are by themselves—young women, I mean; for this story does not treat of old ladies (except one or two of a motherly character), and it is left to each one of my readers to suppose what old ladies are, by contemplating the different young ones and imagining what they will become.

While these two charming *young* women, then, were talking together, they heard a bell tinkling in the lower regions of the house.

"I wonder who that is?" Lucy involuntarily exclaimed, assuming that it was the front door bell.

"A visitor, I am afraid," replied Madame, carelessly; "I trust Peter will have sufficient wit to say I am not at home;" and then added, "I am afraid I did not give him any positive orders."

It appeared, however, that Peter had not the requisite wit, for it was evident from the sounds below that some one had been admitted into the house.

A person's senses are in certain circumstances sharpened, and acutely intensified, when, for instance, he or she is under the influence of any ruling passion; and Lucy, when she heard the sound of the footsteps in the hall below, seemed to be seized with wonder and expectation, as if she had actually recognized the sound of the distant foot, and was thinking that she must be deceiving herself—dreaming of an impossibility. She sat upright on the sofa, listening, while her companion watched her from under her long black eyelashes.

A knock at the door. "Come in," said Madame, and Peter opened the door.

"Count" (Lucy started) "Jagellon is in the drawing-room, Madame," said he.

"Wait a minute," the Countess said (she seemed to be thinking the matter over, but she was in reality giving her friend time to recover from her surprise).

Lucy was leaning back now on the cushions, and looking a little pale and rather startled.

The Countess, after apparently thinking for a minute or two, while Peter stood discreetly outside the room, holding the door nearly closed, said dubiously, "Shall we see him here, Lucy?"

"Oh, yes," the other said, her eyes expressing her assent more than her words.

"I think that will be best," Madame observed. "Peter, bring the Count up here. We will make him entertain us for a short time," she added, when Peter had gone. "I scarcely know what manner of man he is, so we will draw him out, and you must help me, Lucy, as you know him better than I."

Presently there was another knock, the door opened, and Peter ushered in Jagellon. He came in, glanced for an instant round the room, his eyes sparkled (as Madame observed), and then he came up to the two ladies.

"I am afraid I am interrupting a delightful *tête-à-tête* ; if so, please dismiss me at once," he said, shaking hands.

"You have given the word of the situation," replied the Countess ; "I had just described you as a simple bore."

The pleasant smile on her face gave the lie direct to her words.

"Exactly," said Jagellon, laughing ; "I will therefore stay long enough to ask if Miss Golding has quite recovered from her *fortunate* accident, and learn if I can be of any service to you, and I can then leave this delicious abode, though with regret."

The dialogue between the three then proceeded as follows :—

MADAME. I do not know why you should use the epithet "fortunate" to describe Lucy's *misfortune*.

JAGELLON. Certainly, it was a most fortunate occurrence for me, since it was the means of my becoming acquainted with Miss Golding.

MADAME. Prettily said.

LUCY. Really, I am not sorry myself that it happened. Perhaps I should not have known you so soon but for that fortunate accident (*to MADAME*).

JAGELLON. Are you so recently acquainted, then?

MADAME. Well, no. We first met at that famous ball at Rosencranz's.

JAGELLON. Then, Miss Golding, you and I are contemporaries.

LUCY. Yes.

MADAME. But Lucy has beaten you hollow, Count, in the race for my friendship. We are as thick as thieves.

JAGELLON (*speaking by means of his eyes*). Will you not count me, too, as a friend? (*Aloud, laughing*) Thieves is the word. I fancy this is a perfect den of thieves (*looking round the room*).

MADAME. Den of thieves! what blasphemy!

JAGELLON. Not at all, true Scripture. This is the famous abode where men lose their eyes and hearts, and no wonder.

LUCY (*laughing heartily*). What a dreadful idea! Had you not better call the police? though, perhaps, you have nothing of value to lose.

JAGELLON. Have you already searched me and found nothing?

LUCY. Oh dear no—at least I have not. Had you not better declare anything of value?

JAGELLON. Certainly, if you wish it. Gold

watch and chain, with a sovereign attached, that is about all.

MADAME (*laughing*). Dross — mere dross. Surely you do not accuse us of stealing gold?

LUCY (*demurely*). But I recollect that I *borrowed* something from Count Jagellon.

JAGELLON. What is that?

LUCY. A hat, which I appropriated for use in the Serpentine, and I fear, spoiled. Will you inform me what is the amount I owe, with interest?

MADAME. Bravo! Now I think of it, I am in your debt too, for a suit of dress clothes.

(*Stage direction.*—JAGELLON *stands leaning one arm on the chimney-piece, looking down on the occupants of the sofa.*)

JAGELLON. As I have now entered on the business of a dealer in old clothes, you will not be surprised at my charging heavy interest.

MADAME. Please let us know what percentage.

JAGELLON. It is a bill at sight. I have not calculated the amount (*looking at MADAME*).

LUCY. Oh, I do not understand those terms.

MADAME. Nor I.

JAGELLON. And as to interest, I leave it to you; give me as much of your interest as you can.

MADAME. Well, we will give you a small amount, if you behave well. To begin with, tell us all the news. We are Corinthians, who thirst for some new thing.

And so they talked together, and the Count entertained the ladies with stories of Ascot, who had won, and who had lost, and who had been staying with whom. Lucy learnt the difference between the Gold Vase, the Gold Cup, and the Hunt Cup. She heard of all the gay doings at a certain house in the neighbourhood. Had Jagellon been there? No, he had not, he had been detained in town.

Then Madame changed the subject from racing to the Exhibition, and Lucy was informed what were the most entertaining things to see there; where were the velvet-making and printing-machines, where were the silks and satins, and which was the most *outré* pre-Raphaelite picture there.

Insensibly, she and the Count talked only to one another, while Madame de Woronzow lay back in the cushions fanning herself, and to all appearance languidly listening. The Count inquired whether Fipps was going to St. Petersburg after all. Lucy did not know, and why did he ask? He said that he had heard sinister rumours concerning the politics of that Empire.

Even as attaché, he might have some difficulties to contend with there. Lucy listened and asked questions, while Madame lay there on the sofa, and said never a word. At last Jagellon rose to go.

“When shall I have the pleasure of seeing you again?” he said to Lucy. “Are you still nervous?”

“Oh no, I do not feel afraid,” she answered. “I don’t know when mamma will let me ride again—some day next week, perhaps.”

“Say Wednesday,” he said.

“I will try and go there on Wednesday,” said Lucy.

“And we can make a little party, you know, if (turning to the Countess) Madame de Woronzow will be so kind as to accompany us. It is so much jollier when one can ride together in a party.”

Madame Woronzow said she had no objection to joining them.

“Then I will escort you, Countess, and Fipps can bring Miss Golding, and we will meet in the Row.”

Madame looked at him, and said, “Yes, if you like.”

Then he shook hands impressively with Miss Golding, carelessly almost with Madame (at

least so she thought), and left the room. Lucy did not stay very long after him ; the time had slipped away so swiftly that she found she had only just time to go back to tea and Church. And before she went she threw herself into Madame Woronzow's arms and kissed her with all the ardour of girlish affection.

"I wish I could see you every day," she said.

"Come as often as you like, dearest," replied her friend ; "I love you so much that I should be sorry to be separated from you for a day. I am a lonely woman after all."

"And I love you dearly, too, Madame."

"No, no, call me Theodora," she answered, "and I shall always call you my dearest Lucy."

"Good-bye, then, dearest Theodora," said Lucy, and with another kiss they parted.

What was their mutual affection ? Sisterly love, and common friendship ? Or was it more likely some subtle link that bound them together, this young innocent girl, and this woman in the zenith of her beauty, full of all knowledge and skill in the ways of the world ?

Perhaps it was a friendship bound by the self-sacrifice of one for the other—strangest of all sacrifices, where one woman devotes herself,

not for her hero's sake, but for the sake of the happiness of a girl she likes.

Is not such an idea a monstrous chimera?—impossible, at least in the present struggle for existence!

CHAPTER X.

A CONVERSATION.

ARE not the summers of our years the oases in the deserts of our lives, at least in these northern regions of the earth? What happy days can we remember during the fogs and snows of winter? Or do the inhabitants, I wonder, of those blest regions nearer the Equator have a festive time of it during the rainy seasons?

When, for instance, do those sudden strange meetings occur, those too short acquaintances take place, when a spark was struck by the contact of two minds—a fitful spark, which flashed and disappeared? In the warm air of a summer's night, was it not? or by the river's side, with the yellow corn still standing?

And what is the date of the letter we periodically read over again—the letter which tells of a game we lost, of a heart that could not be ours?

Such letters, I fancy, are oftener dated June, July, or August than November or December.

At least it was so with Lucy, though possibly other people might answer the foregoing questions in a different manner.

This particular summer of the year 1862 was the brightest spot in Miss Lucy Golding's little existence.

Doubtless to most people London during this time may have seemed hot, dusty, and glaring, and its pleasures were very likely very tiresome. But Lucy lived then within a golden cloud of romance, and everything to her was sunny and golden. Day followed day, and each brought some fresh pleasure, some newly-awakening delight. If she had no other enjoyment she had the companionship of Theodora, to whom she could tell all the little sentiments and thoughts which passed through her mind.

And sometimes, no doubt, Lucy's tender heart needed some balm of comfort. Her bright particular star, it must be confessed, was a somewhat erratic one; its movements were rather those of a comet—sometimes a brilliant wonder, and sometimes a very indistinct and nebulous affair.

Even the faithful Theodora, secretly working on her friend's side, was often puzzled, and her skill in calculating the course of the comet was baffled by its eccentric movements. But never-

theless she persevered in her calculations, for surely, she thought to herself, two such charming young people with such ardent minds were meant by heaven to be mated.

Whatever skill she had she employed in her friend's behalf, so that the pair, Lucy and Count Jagellon I mean, had fair opportunities of seeing each other as they cantered together down the Row, for instance; or as he bent over her *fauteuil* at the opera, explaining to her the music and the drama.

And then, after such little réunions, how pleasant it was to sit in the Countess's boudoir the next morning talking over the previous day's pleasure, while Madame was writing a letter or two, and Lucy was doing some needless crochet-work perhaps.

So they were sitting together a few days after that Sunday afternoon, the events of which are recorded in the last chapter. Madame was nominally engaged in writing a letter to Mr. Mentzel, a somewhat difficult operation one would think while Lucy was chatting to her from the sofa.

"I was obliged to leave town," she wrote, "to visit a friend of mine at Twickenham, after having seen B—, and I have only had leisure during the last few days for considering what he told me about affairs."

She had proceeded thus far, and was considering her next sentence, when she was interrupted by Lucy.

“Theodora, is Count Jagellon rich?”

“Not very. Why?”

“He seems to spend a good deal. He told me he had a regular seat at the opera, and he keeps horses and a carriage you know.”

“He has enough to live on, I dare say,” remarked Theodora; “but I should not say he was rich. A man can spend a good deal of money without being rich.”

“Is he as rich as Gus, do you think?”

“I dare say he is better off at present; but then you must remember that Gus has better prospects in the future.”

“But he wouldn’t marry for money, would he?” asked Lucy.

“Really, I could not answer for him,” replied Theodora, with a laugh which made Lucy look up quickly from her work and blush. “For all I know he may have decidedly sordid views of matrimony.”

“Oh, but he would not be obliged to marry for money. He has got sufficient to live on, I mean.”

“Yes, I should think so.”

After having satisfied herself on this point

Lucy remained silent for a time, and Madame's letter made some progress.

"It seems to me that, however useful and necessary it may be to prevent *them* from obtaining increased power and means, this is at least only a negative means of attaining our object. Our chief aim must be to strengthen ourselves, by organizing our party and endeavouring to gain always fresh adherents to our cause. We must let the people know that we are aiming at their freedom, and then, I believe they will join with us and effect their own liberation. We cannot gain our object by a *coup d'état*."

Here the letter was again interrupted.

"I wish I was not rich—an heiress, you know," said Lucy suddenly.

"So that you might be certain that whoever wanted to marry you was actuated simply by admiration for your good looks," replied Theodora, smiling.

"Oh no, not exactly that," blushing again. "There are plenty of girls quite as pretty as I am ("I don't know that," from Theodora, *sotto voce*), and therefore," proceeded Lucy, "if any one chose me I should know it was because he really liked me better than others."

"I should run away with somebody," suggested Theodora, "and then Papa would be so

displeased with you that he would give you nothing."

"How nice that would be! But I am afraid dear old Papa would persist in making me rich all the same."

"And would you like to cook your own dinner, and make your own dresses, and live in a tumble-down house, and have periodical squabbles with your butcher and baker and greengrocer?"

"I should not mind, for his,—if he—that is supposing——"

"Ah, ah!" laughed Theodora; "you silly, romantic, dear little girl, you would soon grow tired of it, and so would he, depend upon it. And then you would quarrel and he would grumble——"

"Oh, no!" interrupted Lucy—"I am sure he wouldn't."

"Not Gus?" said Theodora maliciously; "you ask him."

"Oh, Gus!" ejaculated Lucy, and resumed her work. Theodora looked at her, smiling still.

"No, no, my dear, that is not your fate. You must imagine yourself going to be very rich and beautiful, living in a grand castle with horses, and carriages, and jewels, and dresses, and——"

“ But I don’t want all that, Theodora.”

“ Well, let me finish my sentence then. And last, but perhaps not least, a husband who adores you. Now would not that be nice and romantic enough? ”

“ Yes, if—— ”

“ Ah yes, that perpetual ‘if,’ ” said Madame, leaning back in her chair and becoming grave all at once. “ We should all be perfectly happy were every ‘if’ solved.”

“ What do you wish for, Dora? ”

“ Oh, everything,” laughed Theodora. “ I am one of that sort of people who live on impossibilities.”

Then she resumed her literary task.

“ Will you give B—— these ideas of mine, as I fear that I shall not have many opportunities of seeing him privately during this busy season. I would urge upon him to keep in view clearly the one object of our attempts—the liberation of our countrymen. That must be our one object, and the summit of our ambition. Everything else must be secondary and of no account. I for my part expect no rewards or honours, and shall be perfectly satisfied with the simple end we have in view. I am sure you will agree with me, and I recommend you to adopt that *ton* with B—— for fear lest in these

complications he may lose sight of the main issue ”

Having written this, she folded up the letter and leant back in her chair.

Lucy, looking at her as she sat in profile, with the light from the window throwing a light and shade on her head like a picture of Rembrandt's, thought to herself how lovely she was, and involuntarily exclaimed—

“Dora, I should like to be as beautiful and clever as you are.”

Whereupon Theodora came and sat on the sofa, and putting her arm round Lucy's slim waist, said—

“And I wish you to be very happy, darling ; and that you may find some one capable of loving you as you deserve to be loved.”

And then they proceeded to chat *à la femme* till it was time for Lucy to go home to dress.

CHAPTER XI.

NECESSARY, BUT NOT PARTICULARLY INTERESTING.

IN the year 1851 the civilization of the nineteenth century *post Christum* may be said to have reached its highest point of perfection. It was then that a new gospel, hitherto unheard of, was promulgated to the nations, a gospel which may be expressed in the following formula:—

Peace and wealth to men of good credit.

Wars, it was taught, were to fall into disuse. The different nations formed in agglomerated masses which had been definitely settled by international treaties, were henceforth to occupy themselves with the peaceable questions of trade and manufactures, under the care of various monarchs who, as species of chairmen of companies, were to undertake the promotion of the industries and the welfare of the people. Such was the new gospel.

“L’Empire, c’est la paix.”

Liberty was embodied in free trade.

Religion consisted in the toleration of every creed, and the promotion of charitably-commercial enterprises.

Art was mechanism and science, practical engineering and chemistry.

A religion must necessarily have a temple, a fane, a Jerusalem, a Mecca or a Rome, as a centre for the faithful and a visible sign of its existence.

The new gospel was therefore inaugurated by the building of a magnificent structure, which was appropriately built of glass to symbolize the creed of a church which had in the beginning renounced the employment of hurtful missiles.

In the temple were collected samples of the peoples, the manufactures, and the produce of the whole world.

The success of the new gospel (religion it can scarcely be called) was unmistakable ; its principles were universally adopted, and it was decreed that in every decade the faithful should congregate to a new temple, there to *exhibit* and contemplate the wealth of nations.

It could not, however, be expected that this new faith should all at once convert the world, and it was a deplorable evidence of the slow progress of civilization that three sanguinary wars were

waged during the next ten years in different parts of the globe, while a brilliant comet threatened, at least so it was thought, the destruction of the entire earth.

Nevertheless, a second temple was duly reared in the year 1862, the year in which took place the events of this story. This temple, commonly called the Exhibition of '62, to distinguish it from the Great Exhibition, was even larger, more opulent, and more varied in its votive offerings than was its predecessor.

The structure was prudently built this time almost entirely of brick and iron, but two great glass domes towered above the rest of the building, in imitation of the vitrescent temple aforementioned.

During the period in which the Exhibition was opened, it was computed that some millions of people had visited and gazed at the curiosities within its walls; and the visitors included people from almost every country in the world. It was no uncommon thing to find that the person who had trodden on your toe was a cousin from the antipodes, or a friend whom you had hoped never more to meet. On the other hand, amongst such a variety of people it was natural that every type of face and figure should be represented there, and the frequency with

which a perfect stranger was slapped on the back or grasped by the arm under the impression that the person was an intimate friend, became a standing joke of the period.

There was another popular joke connected with the place. The extent of the building, and the infinity of the objects which were there exhibited, rendered a visit of six or seven hours necessary in order to gain some idea of the Exhibition. And as the number of seats was wholly inadequate to the crowds who desired to be seated, it was usual for the visitor to leave the building footsore and leg-wearied. Hence originated a curious cry, which was taken up by every street-boy in London, and which consisted in the insulting and ungrammatical inquiry of "How's your poor feet?"

Doubtless there was a strange mixture of persons as well as of things in this huge emporium.

Here at length the aristocracy of society came face to face with the uncouth barbarians of the north. Scotland and Lancashire, Yorkshire and the black country suddenly discovered a new use in railways and flocked up to London for a holiday. Thus in the Exhibition, and especially on the more select days, when half-a-crown was charged for entrance, marchionesses and brewers'

wives, dukes and cotton-spinners, iron-masters and ambassadors jostled and stared at each other.

In fact at the Exhibition, Aristocracy left its card on Trade; Society shook hands with Commerce; Wealth was formally recognized as a sufficient introduction to Society. Aristocratic dames braved the noise and smell of the Western Annexe to watch with amusement and interest how their silks and satins and velvets, no longer made with hands, were spun out of intricate machinery with extraordinary ease and rapidity. On the other hand, the ladies of the provinces, who were as familiar with steam and machinery as with beef or bread and butter, stared in amazement at the skill with which the silks and cottons which they had manufactured were made into fashionable costumes. For the first time they understood the meaning of the word Fashion. Paris, which had been to them the home of the French and wickedness, now became the seat of all elegance and fashion. They learnt with astonishment that the journey to Paris was about the same as a journey from Glasgow, and they braved the dangers of the channel passage and travelled to Paris, Switzerland and the rest, bringing back to their friends in the north thrilling accounts of what they had seen on the Continent.

Thus began that second migration of barbarians—a migration which has since swept over the whole of civilized Europe. A singular phenomenon resulted from this migration. It will be remembered that the Goths and Vandals, after ransacking and burning the palaces and villas of the emperors and patricians of Rome, ended by building churches and monasteries of their own, some of which were solidly ugly, others strangely beautiful and elegant in their architecture. Similarly, the sons and daughters of Trade in their eagerness to become aristocrats began to patronize Art, and laid violent hands on all they could get. Old pictures and new pictures, old masters and pseudo-masterpieces were indiscriminately bought up. Cotton spinners became the most extensive art collectors in the world. If they liked a picture they bought it, no matter at what cost, nor whether it was good art or bad art. It resulted from this that all order and discipline in art was lost, all schools were broken up and every artist painted at haphazard, confident that somebody or other would buy his picture if it was realistic, sentimental or eccentric. The Royal Academy was horror-struck to hear that day by day a crowd continuously struggled, under the eye of a policeman, to catch a glimpse of the "Light

of the World." On the other hand, Frith's great pictures were sold for prices which a Turner or a Titian might not hope to obtain.

In short, this new gospel had revolutionized society. Everything was topsy-turvy, trade had become aristocratic, and aristocracy had become commercial.

Such were some of the results of the Exhibition of '62. It was the last and greatest of the London exhibitions, for though a feeble attempt was indeed made to erect a third temple of commerce ten years later, it was recognized as a distinct failure—a meaningless enterprise altogether. By that time the new religion had gone out of fashion, and Europe was convulsed with wars and the rumours of wars.

In short, it may be said that in the space of twenty years the religion of the Nineteenth Century was born, flourished, and then gradually expired.

But whatever effect this remarkable building had on the world, it was at least a very important element in the lives of our four friends. It is probable that, without the opportunity afforded by the Exhibition for everybody to see everybody else, two people whose lives were so very different as were Lucy's and Count Jagellon's,

would never have become intimately acquainted with each other.

At the same time Gus had more opportunities than he could otherwise have had of using his diplomacy, and promoting his interests with the two great powers, Madame de Woronzow and Miss Golding

Of course there were other occasions of meeting, such as Rotten Row ; but one cannot always be riding, nor can people always be seen together at most places without being remarked, whereas in the Exhibition, it was the natural thing for everyone to meet everybody else.

Sometimes all four were together in the Row, Gus, Madame, Lucy and Jagellon. This was generally the order of the line of march, and the army was generally flanked by irregular cavalry, who joined the main body. Certainly it was one of the sights of the Row to see this line sweep down the roadway at a gentle canter. Madame de Woronzow and Lucy generally occupied the centre of the line. Madame in a black habit, which set off her fine supple shoulders, a glossy hat just tilted over her forehead, and a damask rose in the bosom of her habit. By her side rode Lucy, in her dark blue habit, with fresh young cheeks rosy with the exercise, and flaxen hair and delicate figure. On these occa-

sions Gus was always on one side of Madame, Gus in the neatest of boots and on the neatest of brown horses. Nor was the big Jagellon unremarked, especially by the ladies, who, as they rode past, frequently glanced at him on his great chestnut trotting as the others cantered down the Row.

I dare say many of the ladies envied the pretty girl by his side, to whom he chatted and laughed, sometimes whispering a malicious observation on some heavy weight of the female gender, or some aldermanic figure that kicked and bumped up and down as his horse trotted painfully past the cavalcade; and sometimes bending over his horse's neck to send a word across to the beauty in black, and perhaps to glance at the damask rose and the red lips.

If he were only Gus there by her side, and Gus were he!

It must be said, in justice to Gus, that at this time he exhibited a degree of diplomatic talent for which few members of the service would have given him credit.

He had been acute enough to observe that Lucy had made a confidante of Madame de Woronzow, and with great astuteness he immediately used every means of getting into the Countess's good graces. He obtained boxes for

her at the opera, he attended assiduously on her at any parties where he met her, and he conducted her at different times about the Great Exhibition, about the ins and outs of which he had contrived to know everything.

And then, as a master-stroke, he himself took Madame into his confidence one day (a half-crown day) when they all four made an expedition to the great show.

After having seen some of the French silks and criticized the Koh-i-noor and the emerald of Harry Emanuel, and derived some amusement from watching the manufacture of clay pipes, they turned into the refreshment rooms to have an ice. While they were there Lucy, who was chatting with the Count, expressed a wish to see the velvet-making machine which Jagellon had once described to her.

"Oh," said Madame, "I do not think I am equal to going into that hot and *smelly* place."

Whereupon some embarrassment arose amongst the party, for Jagellon, not knowing whether he ought to take Lucy there, looked at Gus for instructions, and Lucy, seeing there was some difficulty, said she did not mind about it.

Then it was that Gus showed his knowledge of finesse.

"I do not much care myself about the

machinery," said he, in a well-dissembled tone of ennui, "so, if you do not mind, Lucy, perhaps Jagellon would take you there."

"With pleasure," said the Count, and rose to go.

Then Lucy, blushing, murmured, "If it is not giving you too much trouble," and went off with the Count to see the machinery, Madame telling them that she and Gus would stay where they were till they came back.

As soon as he was left alone with Madame, Gus, after some preliminary conversation, plunged *in medias res* by saying he wanted to ask her advice about his engagement, "as she was Lucy's confidante," he said.

He stated his case simply. He feared the engagement was growing distasteful to Lucy, and in that case, though he on his part wished more than ever to marry her, yet if he had not her full consent he was resolved himself to break the engagement.

Madame replied cautiously, that she was scarcely Lucy's confidante, and that she certainly did not think Lucy wished to break her engagement, and she advised Gus, if he still felt the same as when he entered into his engagement, to keep to his word, "and," she added, "try to win her affection for yourself.

If you doubt her liking for you, make it sure."

Gus thanked her for her advice, and asked her as a favour that she would be sure and tell him if she ever thought that he ought to break it off.

"Well," she said in reply, "I do not expect you will follow such advice, but I will give it you when I think you want it."

So Gus gained his point, and had made a confidante of Lucy's confidante. And he opened his mind further to Madame with considerable frankness. In a somewhat melancholy strain he lamented the opportunities he had missed of improving his own knowledge of the world, of acquiring more culture and taste. "I know nothing," was the refrain of his lament, and more than all he regretted that when he had gained Lucy he had not made the most of his prize.

To this Madame simply replied that it was not too late to mend.

Meanwhile the other pair had proceeded into the Western Annexe, which was redolent of hot oil and noisy with the sound of whirring wheels and huge cranks. They did not stay long to superintend the manufacture of velvet, and after having taken a small piece of the material as a

memento, Lucy declared she had had enough of it. Then they sauntered, at Lucy's request, to the terrace overlooking the Horticultural Gardens, where they sat to enjoy the view.

The scene was indeed an almost enchanting one. Before them lay the gardens, laid out with beds of many-hued flowers, and with one or two fountains splashing and sparkling in the sun. On the gravel walks and in between the flower-beds people were strolling about or were resting on seats talking; ladies in sweeping dresses of various bright colours in harmony with the gardens, and with fringed parasols covering their large and ornate bonnets; men in correct attire, not too sombre, with their white hats and lavender kid gloves. Beyond all this glistened the conservatory, and overhead towered the great glass domes of the Exhibition, while from the Annexe on the left came the distant hum of the machinery, and in the gardens a band was playing one of Strauss's voluptuous waltzes.

This was one of Lucy's red-letter days. How brightly the sun shone! How blue was the sky overhead, bedecked with snowy clouds! How sweet was the smell of the flowers! In short, how beautiful the world was, how romantic and lovable!

In what way the conversation had begun it

would be difficult to say, but they were now engaged in talking about each other. Jagellon had laughingly propounded the question, what it would be like to live always in a palace as big as the Exhibition building.

Then Lucy described her own home and said how much she loved it, and he in his turn explained to her that he was an orphan and had very little idea of what home meant, adding that he thought she must be very happy in her home, and how much he could wish to have one like hers.

She remembered that phrase accurately. Thinking afterwards of that little conversation, she accused herself of being too bold; she feared that she had almost given him the idea that she wished he shared her home with her.

As a fact she had merely said that she sympathized very much with him, and that she hoped he would count on her and her family as his friends, and he had replied that he had already presumed to do so, and that he was so glad he had made her acquaintance.

These and other little confidences passed between them, and Heaven knows how long they would have sat there, had not some wonderful clock in the building behind them struck the hour, reminding them that the others were

waiting for them, whereupon they jumped up in haste to return to the refreshment room.

Entering the Exhibition was like passing from fairyland to the commonalities of this world. Instead of the sunshine and the flowers and the music, there were merely the ordinary fruits of work-a-day industry. There stood a pulpit, whence before long would be preached the platitudes of every-day sermons. They could look down a vista of cases filled with silks and satins and feathers and lace, which would some time be worn and cast aside by somebody. Along the nave were jewels and ornaments of gold and silver, to bedeck the elect of this world—perhaps a beautiful girl or a charming bride, perhaps a wrinkled old hag, or the fat body of a millionaire's wife. Near by was a great bell forged for some new belfry, and there were curious clocks, and elegant watches; for this was no forest of Arden, you could tell the time to a minute, how fast the world was going or how slow.

Down another long row of manufactures were hardware and tools to procure the necessities of life, from a printing machine (now, I believe, counted among the necessities), which was in the form of a piano, and was being played by a young lady for the amusement of an admiring

crowd, to a steam plough, which was being scrutinized by a couple of sturdy farmers. And here is the refreshment room, where, indeed, food is manufactured for those who have wherewithal to procure it.

Here Madame and Gus were patiently waiting for the truants. Madame received them with a dubious smile, and at once proposed that they should all go home, so they left the busy place, and the ladies drove off in Madame's carriage, while Gus and the Count departed to their club more like co-lovers than rivals.

Lucy spoke little as she drove home, but when she parted from her friend she pressed her hand with a glad smile, and Theodora augured that her work was nearly finished and that her calculations had come true. As to herself, Theodora believed that fate was already deciding her case. For a moment she might have fancied that her life of endless State intrigues was to cease, or at least to be relieved by a new element in it. For she longed for some one in whom she could confide; she was so alone, she was really so weak. Hitherto she had been able to fight the world by acting on the defensive; she had gained favourable terms from her husband; she had probably contrived to get him in her

power, and she had thus managed to keep a quiet course through society.

She had endeavoured to make herself like other ladies, outwardly at least, and had so far succeeded that she was everywhere received by the most respectable people, and was considered a leader of the *beau monde*. But with all this her life was a hard one; her ambition seemed unattainable, and she had no one to comfort her in her well-nigh hopeless aims. Scarcely any one has been actuated by a love of his country without having some living being who represented his country; an idea is generally incarnate. And for an instant, I say, the Countess Theodora thought she had found her ideal embodied.

She had been mistaken, that was all; and her delusion was rudely dispelled by the labours of preparing for a garden party, and the difficulties of her connection with General Bagration.

CHAPTER XII.

DUBIOUS.

Yes, no doubt all this—the course of events, I mean, which I have just recorded—was all very satisfactory. Madame de Woronzow believed that she had secured Lucy's happiness, and felt a sort of happiness herself in the success of her calculations.

Lucy began to believe that her hero deigned to regard her with affection. And Gus hugged himself in the thought that he had secured the co-operation of his heroine's greatest friend and confidante in his love affair. All very satisfactory this to the persons concerned, except one—I mean Count Jagellon himself.

He alone was dissatisfied with everything. He had gained little, and what he had gained he seemed to be losing steadily.

His case lay in a nutshell. He had met with a woman whom he could not help admiring excessively; in his eyes she was very beautiful, very clever, and very powerful—the very woman

for a man gifted with pluck and tired of the common attractions of society to fall in love with.

But there were several obstacles in the way of his worshipping her in deed as well as in thought. Imprimis, she was married already, and could and would only be admired from a distance. Item, she had given herself up entirely to the cause of her country, and made this her one aim in life. Item, if she was pleased with the admiration of men in general—a fact which was not proven—she did not appear to wish for the admiration of Count Jagellon. This last item was in Jagellon's eyes the greatest obstacle of all to his worship of his beautiful idol. She was polite to him; there was something almost kind and gentle in her manner to him at times, but—but that was all. Once, indeed, she plainly showed to him that she actually despised him, when he had claimed to be her countryman. She had never alluded to the subject again, and he had never found an occasion for proving his devotion to her and to her country. On the contrary, she seemed to have repented of having shown her feeling to him, and ever since treated him with a subtle indifference. He could not define her attitude towards himself, but he was sensible of an air of

bored indifference in her. For instance, when she invited him into her boudoir that day she treated him to general persiflage, and he felt then that she was bored with him.

Then again, on the first occasion when Miss Lucy tried her skill in riding, the Count, as it had been arranged, rode over to Rose Lodge to escort Madame Woronzow to Park House, there to meet Lucy and Gus.

But when he arrived at her house he was informed by Peter that she had already gone, and had left word that he would find them—herself and Lucy—in the Park, and thither he went; and after riding round the Park at last met the ladies, escorted by Gus.

And he never was able on any occasion to have the honour of being her escort. She would never tell him when she was going to ride, and he soon found out that his best chance of riding with her was to ask Lucy when *she* was going to ride, for he generally found that Madame accompanied her. Even then, as I have shown, it was Gus who rode by her side, and he had to talk to Lucy.

It was just the same if he saw them at the opera or at a concert; there Madame was sure to be engaged in conversation with some one else, and he had to entertain Lucy so long as

he was by their side. Not that he objected to talking to Lucy. Who would? She was so pretty, her opinions seemed to coincide so well with his (you would have said she copied him), that he enjoyed being with her, and insensibly he found himself growing more and more to like her, opening out his ideas to her, and making a friend and companion of her. It was to him a pleasant enough relationship. He knew she was engaged to Gus, and therefore there could be no danger of his attentions and his friendliness towards her being misunderstood.

The idea of such a thing never entered his head, and he was charmed with his young lady friend, as he considered her.

And yet he was dissatisfied. He was becoming a fast friend of Countess Woronzow's best friend, but he did not appear to advance one step in the good opinions of the Countess herself. Yet he was conscious of no fault in his behaviour towards her; he did not thrust himself on her; he was delicate in his little attentions to her; he contrived to do little services for her—but he got very little thanks for all this. It was Lucy who thanked him gratefully for a box at the opera, or a ticket for some amateur theatricals, which he contrived to obtain for them.

In such circumstances most men would have

given up the pursuit of any woman, and so would probably Jagellon have done in any other case, but here he was not pursuing ; he had no intentions, he did not consider that he was in love with his idol. It was simply a case of heroine worship. He thought her the best, the most beautiful, and the wisest human being that could possibly exist in this commonplace world. In common parlance, no other woman or man could hold a candle to her, in his opinion. And such being the case, he was intensely chagrined to find that he was by no means his goddess's ideal of what a man ought to be, and that she was perfectly indifferent alike to his merits or demerits.

In the end, as a consequence of all this, he began to think himself a fool, and good for nothing. With the natural vanity of man, he had always before considered himself good for *something* ! He could write Latin verses ; he could win a steeplechase ; he had to be well handicapped at pigeon-shooting ; and he could dance, and he could sing. So he used to consider himself fairly accomplished ; and now, in the judgment of the best and wisest of human creatures, he was not worth looking at. The picture was now turned upside down. What was the good of writing Latin verses ? Any

jockey or stable-boy could ride better than he, and the biggest blockhead or scoundrel in the world might be able to shoot pigeons.

To all this catalogue of accomplishments his lady replied with—" *You*, a Polish Count—the descendant of a race of heroes! Look what your father was and what *you* are!" And under this criticism he felt himself to be despicable.

What was he to do? Was there no heroic action which he could perform?

Fancy an heroic action in the midst of London Society!

Society! Society! What nonsense it all was—dressing, lounging, eating, drinking, and sleeping day after day.

He actually blushed at himself as he strolled down Piccadilly at the correct time in the afternoon with his friend Hudson. Himself in the correctest hat, coat, and gloves; Hudson with eyeglass and watch-chain, and stout well-fitted figure.

What asses they both were! he thought to himself. Would *she* not despise him all the more if she was to see him walking along in this guise?

He feared so, and yet, be it understood, he was going to see her—hoped to see her in the lines of carriages in the Park.

In his own opinion he was an ass, *malgré lui*.

That his companion did not share in this view of himself and his companion was evident, as he boldly eyed the passing ladies (also painfully well-dressed, Jagellon thought) through the medium of his eyeglass.

“’Nfernally good-looking woman that!” he would remark as some fair woman took his fancy. “Did you see her?”

“No—was she?” He had never noticed her at all.

“Hallo!” presently exclaimed the eyeglass, “here’s Gus—going to the Club?”

“No,” said Gus stopping with the other two in the middle of the pavement, “I was going to get a tie.” (Dress again!) “Where are you going?”

“Only to the Drive.”

“I don’t mind coming with you.”

“All right,” said Hudson indifferently. “We have just seen a deuced good thing,” etc., etc.

But you have it all summed up for you in the Park amidst the circling array of carriages and horses and powdered coachmen and footmen. Here it all is—dresses, bonnets, lace, silks, rouge, powder, liveries, armorial bearings—all complete.

Truly one might quote Pope with a slight difference—

“ Still round and round the ghosts of beauty *ride*,
And haunt the places where their honour died.”

Look at the old harridans in their clarences and barouches. That tottering old beau there will tell you these wrinkled, yellow-skinned old ladies were actually *beauties* once upon a time. Gallants toasted them, poets sung of them, musicians played for them. And now——

“ Have you seen Mrs. Price’s bonnet ? ” inquires Gus.

“ No, what is it like ? ”

“ Awfully neat thing—all flowers, you know—with border of forget-me-nots.”

In fact it is evident that for this day, at least, Mrs. Guinness Price’s bonnet is *the* thing to see and admire ; every one is on the look-out for her carriage.

Presently it is seen moving slowly in the line of vehicles—a phaeton, driven by her husband—Mrs. Guinness Price’s husband, you know. The carriage is in the line nearest to the railings, and Mrs. P. nods and smiles to her adoring acquaintances as she passes by. Her husband meanwhile attends to his horses’ heads. Off go our three friends’ hats, while Mr. Hudson glares

at the renowned bonnet and the pretty face under it with his eyeglass.

The beauty bends down as she slowly passes by Jagellon.

"Are you going to Lord's on Friday?" she says to him.

"Don't know—very likely."

"How are you going?"

"Oh, on some drag or other."

"I wish you would get me a place. I want to go on a drag."

"If I can get a place on one, you know how delighted I should be to give it up to you," he says, looking at her. "I should not care to give her anything," he thinks inwardly. "What nonsense I am talking!"

"Should you?" she answered to his spoken words, smiling to him the while very bewitchingly. "Let me know if you can do it."

"I will. I will do my very best for you."

"Thanks." With a bow and a smile, he raises his hat, and she passes on.

Hudson, when she is fairly past, half envious, exclaims—

"I say, you are in luck, my boy."

"Devilish luck!" drawls Jagellon. He is looking dreamily along the line of carriages. Where is the Countess's carriage? ah, where?

There is only the Goldings' carriage with Lucy and her mother, and Mr. and Mrs. Hatton inside it. The ladies bow and smile from afar to the two gentlemen they know: and Lucy in addition gives them, or one of them, a very pretty blush as her greeting. Surely it is Gus who is in luck, and not the Count so much. Gus looks very well contented with his good fortune, as he twirls his moustache with an aristocratic air. He does not think Mrs. Price's bonnet half so pretty as Lucy's hat, nor is Mrs. Price's complexion (the envy of half society) to be compared, in his opinion, to the blush on Lucy's cheek.

"I say, this is slow!" says Jagellon, discontentedly, after watching in vain for the beautiful face he longs to see. "I shall go and dress." He is bound for the opera, hoping for another chance.

"I shall go and get a champagne-and-bitters," says Hudson.

"Come with me to get my tie," suggests Gus, and exit Jagellon and the other two from the gay stage of the Park, in opposite directions.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

THE Countess Woronzow's garden party was a peculiar institution ; the arrangements of it had to suit the exigencies of the case. For, in the first place, the garden was small—small at least for a party. On the sward immediately at the back of the house there was just room for Badminton, and a marquee sufficient to hold a score of people was pitched nearly in the centre of the garden. There were besides some pretty arbours, which on this occasion had been fitted up with little tables and cushioned seats, and there were a number of garden seats of the most luxurious pattern placed here and there in the garden ; but when we have added the tasteful setting out of the garden, we have mentioned all the outward attractions of the party.

And yet this entertainment was fashionable ; it might be considered one of the events of the season. A select assortment of the world went there, that is some two hundred people ; and

the way they contrived all to get into the garden was simply by coming at different times, and at different hours. There were different sets of the Countess's friends there, the word having been given to one or two of each set by the Countess at what time they should arrive.

For instance, the Goldings and Mrs Hatton arrived at about half-past four, Gus came soon after five, and Baron and Baroness Rosencranz made their appearance about six, in their yellow barouche with armorial bearings (whence borrowed Heaven only knows), and with their generally golden-liveried coachman and footman. General Bagrathion's coupé drove up to the porch about half-past, and Lord Uttoxeter came about the same time, and was joined soon after by his pet protégée, Mrs. Guinness Price.

About six o'clock the garden was rather inconveniently crowded, people could only stand about the gravel paths and on the grass talking ; a number took refuge in the house, the ground floor of which was thrown open to the visitors, so that they might admire the pictures and old china, and read some of the choice books in the Countess's library.

The Countess herself—really it is time that some mention should be made of the fair hostess—the Countess was everywhere ; without

rushing about, without any fuss, she was to be discovered now in the marquee, now looking at the Badminton players, now sitting in an arbour, and suddenly making her appearance in the library, to point out to a bibliophile her latest acquisition in rare literature. There is no doubt that the Countess herself was one of the main attractions of the party. Every one who came there had a word with her, a privilege which they could obtain nowhere else. The rising young men could repeat a *bonâ fide* bon mot of hers; the young maidens could learn what was the really latest fashion in Paris bonnets; the old gentlemen could ride their hobbies for a while before a handsome woman. There were, of course, other attractions. A pretty woman is a great deal, but some accessories are necessary, as Gus remarked to a diplomatic friend.

“As a general thing I abhor garden parties, but here, you know, you can get as good a champagne as you could desire;” and so saying he took off his *Clos Vougeot* at a gulp.

“Yes,” said the other man, “or anything else. What do you think I demanded of that Communistic-looking creature?” (alluding to poor Peter.) “A glass of absinthe; and he spoke to another fellow, and in an unconscion-

ably short time I perceived the fellow coming down the garden simply carrying my glass of absinthe ostentatiously on a waiter. I was so pleased that I was going to give the fellow something, but he hesitated. Queer lot these fellows are, and the Communist informed me that tipping was not allowed. And, as ill-luck would have it, Madame comes up and insists upon hearing the case, and asked me if I thought I was at my club. She can say nasty things on occasions, but, by Jove!——” and he went off into raptures about the Countess, which can be spared a repetition.

Besides wines and liqueurs, there were fruits in the marquee fit for a perfect Epicurean philosopher, and there was a band of stringed instruments by the house discoursing sweet sounds.

Amongst the least noticed of the guests was Count Jagellon. He had only exchanged half a dozen words with the hostess, who told him she was dreadfully busy; there were more people there than she expected, she said, and she asked him to entertain Mrs. Golding. So Jagellon went and talked to the old lady and Lucy in one of the arbours, and when Mrs. Golding declared she must go, the Countess came up and asked for Lucy to remain with Mrs. Hatton, if they would join a small supper party

after the rest had gone. Mrs. Hatton readily agreed, and so did Lucy, and thus it happened that after Mrs. Golding had left, Jagellon continued to entertain Lucy. For Mrs. Hatton was too busy talking to her acquaintances to chaperon her sister too closely; and as to Gus, he was waylaid by everybody, and had scarcely time to come to his *fiancée* now and then to offer her some fruits, or say a polite word to her.

Gus had no objection to the arrangement; he could parade himself before his ladylove as a man beloved by society, intimate with people of rank, and he had opportunities of paying her little attentions—bringing some strawberries, leaving some great friends openly to come and speak to her, while his rival sat there unnoticed and looking, as Gus thought, quite a nobody. Yes, Jagellon was not particularly brilliant that day. No man is always brilliant; there must be a strong reaction at times, and all he could do was to talk sadly about himself to his companion, as most men are inclined to do to a pretty and eager listener.

“I have persevered long enough,” said he; “I have fought it out without success. It is no good; I am not wanted; Society does not care about me, and I do not care for Society. I have nothing to do, I am only idle and extrava-

gant. I shall end it, leave the whole thing, and get to some out-of-the-way country. I can get something to do as an officer; fighters are always in request in some part of the world."

"Oh, would not that be wrong?" she said, in answer. "Would you not in that way waste all the gifts you possess?"

"What gifts?"

"Why, your musical talents, your tastes in matters of art, and other things that go to make up a gentleman."

"But I have tried to make some use of them and cannot; nobody wants them."

"I like to hear you sing and play."

"Ah! you are an exception—one of a very few. If I have ever given you pleasure I am very glad of it."

"And I am to be deprived of that pleasure for the future?" she asked, in a still small voice.

"I am not the only musician or man of taste in the world, bless you. You will find lots of others."

"I *may* do; but, on the contrary, I may never come across another—— Besides, it is not merely a question of myself, we all should be sorry to lose you. Mamma and papa, and Barbara, and Theodora."

"Who is she?"

"The Countess, I mean."

"Oh, no, you are mistaken, she does not care about me."

"I am sure she cares about you."

"No, she thinks I am a nice young man, I dare say, but that is all. I can see she has gauged me, and has found I am not excellent enough. I think she thought at first I was cleverer than I really am. She sees now what qualities I possess are not solid ones. She is right, I shall take myself off. Perhaps somewhere in the world I may be of use; here nobody requires me."

Never had she heard him speak so sadly, never so openly to her.

She would have given the whole fortune which was to be hers—pooh! what is money in a question of love?—she would have given half her life;—no, that would have been too small a price—of what value is a long life?—she would have given up everything that was most precious to her, could she have said then that she cared for him, and been certain that he would have answered that he loved her. She was not certain, therefore she dared not speak. He liked her—of that she was certain, but she knew not how much. So she was silent.

They were at this time sitting in one of the

arbours overgrown with sweet honeysuckle, and in the silence they heard the soft crunching of the gravel under the feet of the guests as they strolled along the walks, and the cheery laughter provoked by some wag, and the eager talking of a group as they discussed some trifle. Those two in the arbour were alone in the midst of the world. Lucy, for her part, desired nothing better, and she looked at him furtively, with eyes of the utmost tenderness and pity, while he was gloomily drawing figures with his stick on the ground.

The sound of the cheery voices in the garden seemed to irritate him; he turned his head towards the entrance with an impatient gesture. Then he jumped up.

"By Heaven," he said, "I will end it at once, now, before I am weak enough to repent of it! I will say good-bye to you first, Miss Golding. I may not see you again, but I shall always remember your kindness, as one of my best friends—almost the only friend I have ever had."

"Will you let me ask you one thing?"

"What?"

"Do not decide hastily; think it over, consult some friend."

"I have none to consult."

“Madame—”

“Never ! Shall I take you into the garden ? ”
offering her his arm.

“No, thanks, I will sit here a little longer.”

“Good-bye, then, for the present at least.
Perhaps I may see you again.”

He pressed her hand, and looked into her tender eyes with his sad eyes.

“Good-bye,” she answered. There was a tremble in her voice, and he turned and walked out of the arbour, stooping his handsome head under the low doorway.

He strode along the garden path towards the Countess, whom he saw listening amidst a circle of people to General Bagrathion telling the story of one of his fights. Jagellon stood by until the General’s story came to an end, and then, before he could speak, Madame turned to him.

“You are come quite *à propos*,” she said.
“General, I want to introduce Count Jagellon to you ; he is a countryman of mine.”

“Then,” said the General, cordially shaking hands with Jagellon, “I am delighted to make your acquaintance.”

“Then I hope, General, if you ever need any more soldiers, I may claim to serve under you.”

“Bravo! that you shall, sir,” said the General heartily; “and you shall see some good service too. Who knows how soon, eh?” with a knowing look at the company.

“I have no doubt of it; where you are there’s always danger.”

Then he shook hands with the Countess and departed, quite in a matter-of-fact way. Nevertheless, she saw something queer in his looks, and she thought with dismay, “He is rejected!” She glanced round the garden—neither Lucy nor Gus were to be seen.

The fact is that Gus, noticing Jagellon walking down the garden alone, conjectured that Lucy was now by herself, and at once went in search of her. He walked along the grass, stepped across the gravel walk to the arbour, where he thought she was, and looked in. He saw Lucy with her handkerchief to her eyes, crying silently. She saw him the moment he saw her; it was too late for him to pretend he had seen nothing. He stepped in and sat down by her. “Lucy, is anything amiss? do tell me!” He spoke most kindly, quite unlike his usual easy and fashionable way of speaking.

She hastily dried her eyes.

“It is nothing,” she said. “I have a headache a little; I am tired, I think I shall go.”

He detained her ; he had made up his mind to speak to her once for all.

“One moment, Lucy, please ; I want to ask you one question. I have been fearing that you regret our engagement——” She half rose as if to go. “Please hear me out,” he pleaded. “When I asked you to be—marry me, I did so because I liked you. I thought you would suit me ; it was a good match, as they say. But now I regard you with utterly different feelings, because I have become so fond of you, that I feel somehow as if I should not like you to be mine, unless you really, freely gave yourself to me—don’t you see ? Suppose we break the old engagement and begin afresh, if you agree. I am so fond of you, that I would rather lose everything than you ; but are you as fond of me ? If not, dear Lucy” (here the voice of poor Gus wavered), “you are free. We—we will part.”

She was unable to utter a word in reply ; she could not think what to say, and her brain was in a whirl. First, she had a sudden feeling of relief—she was free once more ; she could love whom she liked. But when he ended, her heart smote her. When he told her in his simple way that he loved her, and yet would give her up if she could not feel the same for him, she for the first time in her life felt sorry for him—

felt *for* him. What could she say? She was silent.

"Will you please answer me?" he asked humbly. "I am sorry to—to bother you. I know it seems very queer to tell you now that I care for you, when I ought to have done so all along; but I can't help it, and I must tell you the truth."

"I don't wish to break the engagement," she said.

"But are you really fond of me, Lucy? Do say yes or no."

"Have I given you any reason to doubt it?"

"Yes—no, not exactly; but I can't be sure. Do say." But she would not be pressed.

"I have told you I have no wish to break the engagement; surely that is enough—you have no right to ask more. If you wish it you can do so." Then she rose. "I will go now, please."

He gave her his arm, and together they walked out of the arbour.

Almost immediately, Madame de Woronzow came towards them.

"Where have you been, Lucy dear? I could not think what had become of you," she said.

"I have been sitting down," Lucy answered.

"I felt rather tired. If you will excuse me, Theodora dear, I think I will go. I do not feel very well."

"I am so sorry, darling," said Madame, detaching Lucy from Gus's arm and putting hers round the slender waist. "I am afraid the heat has been too much for you."

Then, as they entered the house, she contrived to get separated from Mrs. Hatton, bustling after them. "Is anything amiss, Lucy darling?" she whispered.

"No, not exactly; I will tell you to-morrow."

"Do, dearest. Come to me in the morning if you are well enough."

"Yes, dear."

"You won't forget?"

"No, dearest Theodora. I long to tell you all." And they threw their arms round each other and kissed with their pretty lips, and as she kissed poor Lucy gave a sob, then turned away to hide her tears and went along the porch to the carriage.

To describe the faithful Theodora's feelings after this parting scene would be beyond my powers, and perhaps it would be useless in any case.

She was in a fever of curiosity.

Had all her plans fallen to the ground?

Lucy was gone, and she would not hear her account of what had happened till the morning, but Gus was still there—about to depart, however.

The Countess pounced upon him.

“Gus,” she said to him, “I want you to do something for me. Come here,” and she led him into the dining-room, where there was nobody but a servant clearing away glasses.

“Gus, what is amiss, tell me? Lucy is crying, what is it about?”

“I don’t know altogether, but it’s all over with me, Countess, as far as we are concerned;” and Gus related what had passed between them.

In conclusion he said, “She is free, I won’t force her to keep to it; she does not wish it, I can see. I’m awfully fond of her, that’s about it.”

“But she said she wished to keep to the engagement,” said Madame.

“She said she did not wish to break it,” he replied, “but she would not say she was really fond of me; she is not, and I won’t force her; she likes another best, and I can’t help it.”

“It seems to me you jump to conclusions,” said the Countess. “Because she would not say right out that she loved you, you fancy she does not. What woman would go and confess

en plein jour under such circumstances? You have made a blunder, *mon ami*; you never should have brought affairs to a crisis so suddenly."

"I could not help it."

"Well, you have not done much harm. You have offered to release her; she has consented if you wish it, *voilà tout*. The engagement is breakable, not broken. Let it remain so. Meantime, you go on as before and do your best to win her. Yours must be a waiting game, Gus."

"But it is hopeless," he said.

"Pooh! *you* don't know. 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' Look here, I shall see her tomorrow: I will tell her that each of you is free to break the engagement. Do you agree?"

"Yes."

"But for the present it is binding on both."

"Will she agree, though?"

"She will if I advise it."

"Oh, you are too good!"

"Nonsense! You have no courage, you men. Why, you have all the advantage of your position, assuming that you have a rival—of which I am not certain, mind you. You have every opportunity of serving her—of showing your affection. Never say die."

"But do you think I have any chance?"

“If I did not, I would advise you to break it at once.”

“’Pon my word,” said Gus, seizing her hand and squeezing it eagerly, “you are the best of women, how can I ever repay you?”

“By being a good boy, and a gallant knight,” she answered, laughing.

“*Au revoir*, and let me know how you prosper.” So Gus departed, and Madame de Woronzow went back to finish off her party over a delicious little supper, thinking all the time of her Lucy, and of Gus, and of Jagellon.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIEB' MICH? LIEB' MICH NICHT?

NOTWITHSTANDING the fatigues of the previous day and only half a night's rest, Madame de Woronzow rose early the next morning, in eager expectation of seeing her friend. Nor had she to wait long. She had to attend to her household affairs and see that everything was put away, and rearranged after the confusion of the party, and she had but just completed her work, and was sitting in her boudoir writing a letter or two, when a ring at the front door announced the wished-for arrival. Lucy was informed by Peter that Madame was waiting for her, and she ran up the stairs, found Theodora standing by the open door of her room, and immediately rushed into her arms. At last she was free to indulge her feelings, and have a good cry, with her friend to help her, for Theodora was moved to tears out of sympathy. And when she had cried enough and been soothed and petted by Theodora, she related her story while they both

sat on the sofa with their arms entwined round one another. Lucy began by describing her interview with Gus, putting the cart before the horse, as women are apt to do.

"He offered to set me free, and I declined it. And now I have bound myself afresh, I shall never be happy again—never!"

This was the gist of her complaint.

"There is no harm done, dearest, believe me," was Theodora's reply. "You are practically free. At present the engagement must continue, but he consents that each shall be free to break it at any future time. In the meantime your marriage is postponed of course, *sine die*."

"Yes, but that is not all——"

"He is fond of you, you mean," put in Theodora.

"Yes, I fear so, and I cannot help being sorry for him—really and truly I am; but what can I do? Theodora, dearest," she continued, the tears breaking out afresh, "he is gone—he is gone; he has said good-bye; I shall never see him again, perhaps;—and he is so dear to me, I cannot tell you! What shall I do?"

"Poor darling! what has he done?"

"He told me he was tired of everything here, and he had no friends; and he was going to

leave England altogether. I told him I was his friend—what more could I say? And he thanked me, and was so kind and so sweet; and he said he would always remember me, but it was best for him to go away. Oh! if I could only be sure—if he only knew—what *can* I do?"

"Where is he going?"

"I don't know, he said he should go and fight somewhere. I know he will be killed! He means to get killed, I believe."

Theodora's face had become thoughtful.

"Did he give any particular reason for this step?" she asked.

"No; he said society did not want him and he was weary of it—that was all."

"It may be all right, darling—I am not quite sure—but anyhow we will stop him going away."

"How?" asked Lucy, eagerly.

"Oh, I will talk to him on the subject. It is only a whim: men have odd whims sometimes, and can be easily persuaded out of them."

"That is another curious thing that he told me—he seemed to dislike you."

"Dislike me?"

"Yes, he said you did not care about him—that you did not consider him worth knowing.

Have you said anything to him to offend him, Theodora ? ”

“ Not that I know of. I once scolded him for what I thought was his indifference to his country, but he did not take it amiss. It was the second time I saw him, and we parted the best of friends. Besides, I believe him to be of too generous a mind to resent being told the truth, even if it hurts his vanity.”

“ Oh, he is generosity itself, and I am sure he is not vain. On the contrary, he is too ready to decry himself.”

“ I will see him myself. I will soon learn what is the matter.”

“ I asked him to consult you, and he said— ‘ Never ! ’ ”

“ H’m ! I must say I am puzzled ; he has got some strange fancy in his head.”

“ But will he see you, do you think ? ”

“ I will make him come and see me,” Theodora replied. She was confident by instinct that she could make him do anything ; she could command, and he would surely obey. She did not analyze the reason of this, but she knew it.

“ And now, darling, do not be disheartened, it may not be so bad after all. Supposing—I

do not say it is so—but supposing that *you* are the cause of his going away——”

“I! what have I done?” said Lucy aghast.

“Nothing; that is it—but I say, supposing he should be thinking about you as hopeless? You are engaged, you are another’s—”

“Oh!” said Lucy, “if I thought that I would tell him. I will go to him.”

“You will do nothing of the kind.”

“But—”

“But he will come to you. Mind, this is mere conjecture; I can be sure of nothing till I see him. But if it is so, I will tell him something and he will go to you.”

“Oh, Theodora!”

“Let us hope for the best,” continued Theodora; “but in any case you will have to bear many trials yet, darling, so you must pluck up your spirits and be brave.”

“I will,” said Lucy. And then she kissed her friend anew, and vowed she was her dearest and truest friend. And from eulogising Theodora she proceeded to eulogize *him*, and probably both these separate praises were pleasing to the hearer.

So they passed the morning in happy conversation for the rest of the time, and when Lucy left she tripped down the stairs with a

much happier, not to say prettier, face than when she mounted them.

Left to herself, Countess Woronzow gave certain directions to Peter, and sent him with a note to Count Jagellon, requesting him to obtain for her a ticket for a certain public ball.

About seven o'clock that evening Peter went to the Count's Club and delivered his letter, receiving an answer to the effect that the Count would get the ticket as soon as he could and bring it to Madame de Woronzow. Peter, having obtained this verbal response, went to Jagellon's residence, where he found Watkins partaking of a slight repast. Watkins received his visitor with open arms and invited him to share his dinner.

The corporeal needs of Watkins having been well attended to, he opened his mind to his companion as follows :—

“Now, look here, Peter ; between you and me, as honest folks, what's the matter with the missus?”

“She is quite well,” replied the other.

“No, no, that's not it. Look here, Peter, you know me—mum's the word with me. Now, what's the row between my lord and her? That's what I can't get at.”

“There is nothing that I do know of,” said Peter.

"But I tell you there is. He comes home last night, swears at me, and then sets to and drinks like a fish. Lord, I know what that means."

"Was he drunk?" inquired Peter.

"Drunk? no fear! It would take a deal to make *him* drunk. Why, he would drink me into a mummy, and I can stand a good deal of the liquid without getting sea-sick. But he drinks off a bottle or two here, and he goes and drinks at the club, and goes on as moody as an old cow chewing the cud. I know what it is—it's woman! That's what it is."

So saying, Watkins deliberately lit a pipe and sat down to wait for Peter's explanation of the fact.

"Yes, I noticed he was what you call sober? sombre, yesterday at the party. But it has nothing to do with Madame."

"Well, who the devil has it to do with?" asked Watkins rather contemptuously.

"Ah, I think it is another."

"Why, ain't he been a following after her all along?"

"Yes, and another lady besides," said Peter.

"What, the little 'un? Well, I did think better of you, Peter; I did not think you were

sich a born fool as to believe that little game was anything but a blind."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I do know; 'cause that ain't his style. I know master, and you don't."

"Why, milady and he are quite friends; I saw him speak to her once or twice yesterday—oh, in a friendly manner—quite so-so, casually."

"That's it, she won't speak much to him,—throws him off like—won't see him—and I can't make out why, d— me if I can."

"But, Mr. Watkins——"

"It's no good to 'Mr. Watkins' me—I tell ye it's a fact, she won't have nothing to say to him."

"But I have just taken him a note to the club, and he said he would call on Madame."

"Oh, she's a-coming round, is she? That's all right. Ah, it's fine times, I can tell you, when he's got a game on. Don't the coin spin neither; and the games I have with the girls a-spooning this and a-flirting about with that!"

"I would advise you, as a friend," remarked Peter, "not to try that here. Madame is very much sharp; she will find you out, and she will dislike you. You keep quiet, that is my advice."

"Oh, very well, I'm equal to that trick just as well. It don't matter which way it is; it is

always 'Watkins, I shan't want you to-day,' says he ; 'and here,' says he, 'is a fiver for you.' So, when it comes to that, I'll let you know, Peter, and we'll have a bit of dinner together, and go to the theater." And he winked at Peter, who smiled in return. Having thus come to an understanding, they soon after parted, as Watkins said he had to take the trap round.

He had to drive his master to two or three places that night ; but when they came home, rather earlier than usual, Watkins found the Count in a good humour, and concluded that the little game, as he expressed it, was going on again. But he did not tell his master what Peter had said, because he thought he had better wait a bit and see what happened.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REFUSAL.

I SUPPOSE we seldom know what is the turning-point in our lives whilst we are in the act of turning. We see it afterwards. We think quite another event is the real event which is to decide our fates, and we find afterwards it was of no consequence—merely a sort of volunteer review, not a decisive battle. Our ignorance of the course of our lives is, after all, only natural, when we come to think that the decisive moment was in the drinking of a glass of wine or some such trivial circumstance, instead of being some grand event, like a first visit to a distinguished personage, when we had carefully attired ourselves, and calculated what we were to do and say.

If this be true, it may possibly account for the matter-of-fact way in which Count Jagellon walked over to Rose Lodge (he did not even take his cab), carelessly dressed, just to go to his club, and merely to give Countess Woronzow

a ticket. Possibly he may have walked through the gold and white portal of the drawing-room he knew so well, with a vague uneasiness—a certain melancholy feeling that perhaps he would not go through that door very often again. But this feeling, if such a feeling did pass through his mind, was momentary. For there was nothing embarrassing in his reception by the Countess. She was evidently idling about the room, arranging some knick-knacks, and putting some flowers in a vase.

She was arrayed in a light grey dress, a dress of gossamer texture suited to the hot afternoon of early July, without ornament, but not without a certain elaboration designed to enhance the beauty of the wearer.

She simply turned to him and held out her hand, saying, "How do you do, Count?" and then went on with her work at the vase.

"I have got your ticket," says he.

"Oh, thank you; I thought you might be able to get one for me. I had a fancy to go to the place, you know."

"Rather a grand affair, I fancy," he remarked; and so the conversation went on about the affairs of society, about the Countess's recent party, and matters of that kind. They were almost old acquaintances by this time—nothing

more, apparently—and they sat together in the bay window, chatting idly.

“So I hear you are going away,” said the Countess presently, just for something to say, as it were. Conversation was somewhat listless on that hot afternoon.

“Yes, I was thinking of it,” he said in a low voice, and he began playing with a stick he had with him. The embarrassed feeling was coming over him again. After pausing a moment he asked, “Who told you so?”

“Oh, Lucy told me something about it. You are going to the Cannibal Islands, or some such place, are you not?” No reply. “I should think it is rather fun wandering about in comparatively undiscovered lands. Every place is more or less discovered now-a-days, you know; one cannot obtain any merit of that kind.” Then she added, as an afterthought, “Shall you be away for long?”

“I don’t know,” he answered sulkily. (“She’s perfectly heartless,” he thought.)

“By the bye,” she went on, listlessly fanning herself, “I see you have given up those romantic notions of yours about Poland—do you remember? Really, I agree with you; it is no good fretting about such things—certainly not at present.”

There was not the slightest sneer in the tone of her voice. "By the bye," and "do you remember?" were her words, as if it was a mere trifle. She did not care about such things really. She was an admirable actress—a grand actress, that was all. ("D— it!" he said to himself; he would end it at once.)

"Yes, I have given it up. I feel I can do no good, and I am determined to leave Europe altogether, and never come back. I am sick and tired of it. Perhaps, Countess, you will allow me to take this opportunity of saying good-bye."

"Are you going away so soon? It is rather a sudden resolution, is it not?"

"Perhaps so?"

"Would it be indiscreet to inquire the reason of such an important resolve?" He hesitated. "Ah, I see it is something special," she said, smiling. "Pray do not divulge the secret."

"There is no secret, certainly not for you. I believe I am acting in accordance with your wishes in going away. You promised that you would let me help you in the work of our country. Doubtless you have changed your mind, you have found, what is no doubt true, that I am not fitted for the work. You wish now to get rid of a person who knows a little

too much of your secrets. Be assured I will keep your secret absolutely, and I trust your uneasiness on my account will soon be entirely removed. I have now only to wish you all success in your undertaking, in which I am not worthy to assist."

He had risen while he was speaking—speaking with an evident feeling of anger. He held out his hand, but she disregarded the gesture and sat still with an amused look on her face.

"May I make one request?" she asked, with a mocking twinkle in her eyes.

"What is it?" he asked, looking steadily at her.

"That you will listen to me for one moment." He leant against a chair in an attitude of attention.

"Far from thinking that you could be of no service to me, I had determined on asking you to join me in what you call my secrets, because I believed from what I knew of you that you had the qualities required for such undertakings, namely, honesty, boldness, and constancy. But," she added, fanning herself, "since you are going away, of course my scheme falls to the ground."

"What do you want me to do?"

"It is useless my telling you now."

“You know well, or you are much more blind than I thought, that I would stay here or go over the world at your bidding. Why will you not bid me serve you then?”

She looked up at him quickly, then dropped her eyes.

“Because,” she said, “it is a difficult thing that I would ask of you, and I doubt whether you would consent to do it.”

“Try me, and if I do not obey send me away, and never see me again.”

“Very well, I will test you. I want you to marry some one.”

“To marry?” he repeated, really surprised.

“Before you refuse or consent I will give you my reasons. I think, from what I have seen of you, that you are better able to shine in domestic life, than in the turmoil and dangers of political intrigues. Your present life is unnatural to you; you would find your natural position with a wife and home of your own. In such a position you would, so I believe, be an example to the world that those who fight for freedom are not merely reckless men who have nothing to lose and everything to gain, but that they may be men living a quiet and domestic life. Moreover, in such a state of life you will be able to assist those who suffer for the cause,

and will be of the greatest use to your countrymen. That is my scheme."

"But no one will marry me. I have, believe me, very little of my fortune now, and my reputation would, I know, make my chance hopeless."

"You will marry a lady of considerable means, and I have quite sufficient influence to bring about the match."

"Who is she?"

"That I will not tell you yet. Do you agree, that is all? I can promise you that the lady I shall choose will be in every way certain to make you a good wife."

"But how can I be of service to you when I am separated from you and bound to another."

"You will not be separated from me; you will be devoted to the cause for which I live; you will be, as well as your wife, my intimate friend and one of my principal helpers."

He was walking up and down the room, hesitating and perplexed, while she watched him carefully—watched each movement and each expression of his face. The prospect seemed to him an enchanting one. To be her friend always, to be devoted to her, to be able to help her and *her* friends in their need, what

happier life could he wish for? Yet he hesitated; he instinctively felt that in reality he would be separated from her for ever. To obey her was to be false to her.

“It is impossible,” he said; “I cannot marry.”

“Have you any prior engagement? Are you bound to another in any way? If so, you must refuse, perhaps.”

He stood and looked at her, and she returned his look steadily, fixing her dark eyes on his, and unconsciously to herself that look decided him. Under the impulse of the moment he resolved “to win or lose it all.”

“Why cannot I serve you alone? If you think me worthy, let me devote myself to you freely—you and our country.”

He stood before her pleading with all the earnestness he could throw into his words.

She read his meaning in his eyes, and a sudden fear came over her. She felt that her plan was falling to pieces, but she made one last effort.

“You will serve me in this way and no other. I have shown you how you can serve your country, as I promised; it is for you to refuse or consent.”

“How can I devote myself to my country

when I am bound to my wife? I cannot do both. No, I will be yours, and Poland's, wholly and entirely.

"Do you refuse, then?"

"Yes, I will not marry, even to obey you."

"Then I wash my hands of you. I see you are as foolish as most men are. You can do nothing without me."

"I will try and do something for your sake; I can get friends to help me."

"Who?" she asked. They stood confronting one another.

"General Bagrathion——"

"Beware," she interrupted him. "You don't know what you are doing."

"I do; it is for you I will act. Will you not even encourage me?"

"No. You will only ruin yourself. It is against my wish that you do so."

"I will risk my ruin. Good-bye, then, Countess. Remember, if you will ever command me, I will obey you. I am in your hands."

"I have nothing more to command. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO SCENES.

THE sun has risen some hours ago, but as yet the inhabitants of the metropolis are not astir. A stray milkman may, indeed, be seen going his rounds, and a cart belonging to a butcher, perhaps, or a market gardener rattles along the road and disappears up a street. Otherwise the view up the long road by the Park is unobscured by cab or omnibus, as Miss Golding emerges from Park House and closes the door softly behind her. She walks quickly up the street leading from the main road—a solitary figure in the morning light.

After walking about half a mile along the straight street she crosses a bridge, and, turning to the left, slackens her pace as she hears the sound of a church bell. After another turn she enters the church in question, just as the bell ceases ringing.

Inside the building the silence of the place is broken by the sound of her boots as she walks

softly up the centre aisles. A few men and women are kneeling in silence here and there in the church. There is no distinction of persons in this place, for every seat is free to the worshipper, and the beggar may kneel by the millionaire.

The bright light of the sun is dimmed by the rich glass windows of the church, but a window, left open for the sake of ventilation, lets in a shaft of pure light, sparkling on the lectern and the floor of the chancel. The effect of this radiance is to throw into shade some ugly galleries which have been built to accommodate the numbers of people who crowd the church on occasions.

After a few moments of utter silence, during which one can almost imagine that one can hear the prayers of the people kneeling about the church, a white-robed clergyman enters and the service begins.

It would be difficult to believe that there is any sin or any kind of wickedness present in this peaceable and secluded spot, at least it would be hard to say what possible iniquity one, at least, of the congregation could have been guilty of, and if she is conscious of some fault, it probably consists in a vague idea that to be happy is sinful.

But repentance is not the only business of religion. There is always something to be petitioned for, and if such petitions as those which are made in this quiet spot are not granted, or at least heard, Heaven must be made of wrought-iron.

These and other small objects of religion take up the half-hour of the service, and then the worshippers issue forth one by one, to work at their daily avocations, and to take their share of the troubles and joys of this mixed life.

The world is already waking up. The shops are opening, the servants in the houses are drawing up blinds and cleaning steps, as Miss Golding returns home to make breakfast and set her father off to his work.

* * * * *

In a little chapel in a certain church—a chapel dedicated to our Lady of Dolours—kneels the figure of a woman in black, whose face is concealed by a veil of the same sombre colour.

Above the kneeling figure is a corresponding picture of a Lady draped in heaviest drapery of mourning. Her eyelids are closed, for they are weary of weeping. Her head is bent as with the weight of her sorrows. Her hands are outspread in the attitude of one who meekly

submits to and patiently bears her undeserved afflictions.

What more fitting place could a woman find in which to indulge in her sorrows? What person, what lady, more able to sympathize with her, a woman, in her troubles, and give counsel by the example of her pure life?

The lady keeps her veil down, probably in order to escape detection, but the concealment is scarcely necessary, seeing that the little chapel is far up the church, and on this occasion is in complete solitude except for the lonely worshipper.

Few people have griefs of such depth that they can derive any solace in this gloomy and solitary chapel. Generally people can get condolence and sympathy from their friends and relations sufficient for their needs, or, failing this recipe, they would be more soothed by contemplating that radiant image in another chapel of the Blessed Virgin in her glory, whence they might deduce the comfortable doctrine that they themselves were almost certain to be saved in the end, and that it was of little use troubling themselves about the misfortunes of other people in this world.

For the rest, in this great long building there was only a meek old man diligently dusting the sedilia in the sanctuary, and a fat and middle-

aged lady in one of the confessionals lisping in the ear of a patient old priest an extensive catalogue of insignificant or imaginary faults, marking each separate item with a perpetual snuffle, and doubtless forgetting to mention the chief sins of her daily life (probably envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness), but not forgetting, perhaps, to hint at the dread sins of her dearest friends and nearest relations.

So the lady in black had the still and almost lifeless church all to herself, in the presence of the image of the purest and saddest of women. Unseen, her tears dropped from underneath her lace veil on to the marble floor; unheard by human ear, her soul poured out its tale of failure. The sacrifice of herself had not been accepted, and yet, O Mother of Dolours! she had subdued herself; she had loved with the purest and most unselfish love; she had striven for the happiness of her two dearest friends, and now she had lost one, and the other—what was to become of her, O Mother? And she looked for answer and for help to the face of the Madonna—the face veiled in black, and the weary eyes. Those weary eyes seemed to recognize in her a sister of sadness, and the face before her seemed to speak an answer to her complaints.

They answered and said—"For her who mourns there is no comfort; for her who is chaste there is no blessing; and she who denies herself shall not be exalted. Such promises, if any such were ever made, were intended for the vulgar, for the common poor. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven and of earth. Let them rejoice in their homes; let them be comfortable by their humble and happy firesides, for their labour is lightened, and they are honoured and befriended by their neighbours. Blessed are they! But for the self-sacrificing woman there is no salvation. Her fair fame shall be traduced; her name shall be a vile jest amongst men;* her life, yea, her very self, shall be a subject of criticism, as long as her name lasts, amongst learned pedants and crabbed doctors. Woe to such a woman!"

So the woman rose from her knees; for an instant she raised her veil—the Countess Woronzow! Her lips were shut tightly, and her face was now resolute. She turned and bowed her knee and walked slowly down the church, while the meek old man raised his head at the sound of her silk train, and the middle-aged

* The favourite form of blasphemy in some Catholic and orthodox countries appears to consist in a variety of allusions to the Blessed Virgin.

lady, newly absolved from her transgressions, stared at her tall figure, examined the make of her dress, and calculated the probable cost of it with a feeling of envy, expressed by a snuffle of her prurient nose.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GENERAL'S LOVE AFFAIR.

GENERAL BAGRATHION has scarcely been heard of since the beginning of this story, and for a very good reason. History, it has been said, takes no account of the happiness and prosperity of mankind, but has only to record its many failures and disasters—and as the General's affairs all this time were progressing in a manner very satisfactory to himself, we had no need to say much about him. It may be remembered that this history is a true one—at least half of it is, the other half is doubtful.

It is, however, necessary to prove that the General was in a prosperous way, and as we have documentary evidence to support our case, we produce it at once, and submit it to the learned reader, as below, translated from the original French :—

“ MA CHERE MADAME,—

“ As I have so little time and opportunity for seeing you I make bold to write to you for

the purpose, if you will allow me, of confirming what I said to you at Baron Rosencranz's.

"It has struck me that you may not have fully understood me then, and I can better enter into the necessary details by letter.

"First, permit me to repeat in writing what I have said to you, that I really love you, and have, I swear, never cared for any one else since I made your acquaintance.

"Moreover, I am resolved never to marry any other lady but yourself. I had already made up my mind not to marry any one, because it might interfere with our designs, but should I be so happy as to obtain your consent, it would benefit instead of damage the cause. I say 'marry,' because, apart from the impossibility of my ever desiring to lessen the honour and respect with which the world regards you, I must have you bound legally to myself or not at all.

"My scheme is this. You will sooner or later be forcibly divorced from your present husband. If our plans succeed, Count Woronzow will be one of the first to suffer either loss of life or exile, and in the latter case I think it will be necessary for you to disconnect yourself entirely from him in order to do away with any suspicions in the minds of our patriots.

"If we fail, the Count's only safety will be to

disavow you and solicit a decree of divorce, for in this case you will certainly be found out as one of the leaders of the conspiracy. As to your right to be divorced, that is too delicate a question for me to touch upon, but you will allow me to say that I think the Count would not at any time object to such a course.

"Therefore you may at any moment be free, and it only remains to ask, can I be acceptable to you? We have always been friends—I hope you have never had any dislike to me—but of course all that is very different to accepting me as your husband. That I am perfectly devoted to you I hope you believe now, and if not, I trust I may be able to prove it to you by waiting patiently for your consent, and by placing myself, as you know I can, entirely in your power. I ask only one thing, that you will frankly tell me your mind; if you feel you cannot accept me, say so. I will bear my disappointment, however hard it may be, and in the constant dangers I run I may not have to endure long. But if you consent to make me happy, I can only repay you by loving you, as I do now, with my whole heart as long as I live.

"Believe me, dear Madame,

"Yours sincerely,

"IVAN BAGRATHION."

Madame Woronzow received this letter soon after her return to London, that is to say, during the Ascot week, when she had renewed her acquaintance with Count Jagellon. A day or two after she received the General's "ultimatum," she wrote a reply to him as follows:—

“MY DEAR BAGRATHION,—

“I am glad you have written to me so frankly, because I can reply to you as frankly myself, and we can easily understand one another.

“But we seem to agree on the main point, do we not?—On the difficulty of carrying out your scheme at present.

“I agree to all you say about Monsieur, and it is very possible that the crisis may be close at hand when I shall have to act, but, I must say, I am not very sanguine about it. Things have lasted years and years, and may last yet many years. An old man totters on his crutches a long time before he finally succumbs, and for all our boasted express-speed now-a-days, I think we progress slower than any other age in history. In old times a battle, a plague, or a revolution, used to change everything; now we can have any number of battles and revolutions and not a step further do we go. And, my dear General,

we must wait like everything else, we must go with the spirit of our age.

“But this I will say, that if we ever do gain our end, I have no objection—certainly no *personal* objection—to accepting your proposition.

“For the present let us go on in our old way, working together to a common end, and I only hope we may live to see it. I think I need say no more.

“Votre amie,

“THEODORA WORONZOW.

“I had forgotten one thing—this particular affair must be a secret between us two until the appointed time arrives.”

This letter was without date—ladies are so careless about dating their letters—and it was delivered into the General's hands by Peter, who had to wait a considerable time in the ante-room before accomplishing his mission. The General occupied a suite of rooms, consisting of sitting-room (or ante-room, as I have just described it), private room and bedroom. The sitting-room, with its Turkey carpet, with its tall, arched, plate glass windows and long lace curtains, with its walls ornamented, if we may say so, with

marketable water-colours representing the scenery of any place you like in the world where there are trees and a cow or two, and a stream, and a cottage, and an old woman carrying a bundle of sticks or something of the kind, and a child doing nothing; and besides all these elegant appurtenances, with sundry maps on the walls, time-tables on a desk against the wall, and with business-like looking chairs, the room naturally raised a doubt in the mind of the waiting visitor whether he was in an office or a drawing-room. The said visitor's doubts on the subject would be solved in favour of the former supposition as soon as he entered the private room. There were papers piled up on an office desk which the General had caused to be placed there for him; books on tactics, law, commerce, almanacks, the "Almanac de Gotha" prominent among them, a Debrett, a number of telegram forms, and travelling cases and portmanteaus lying about the room. The fact is, the General was one of the busiest men in Europe or America, in which countries the busy bee is mostly found. He lived on and was nourished by *busyness*. I hope orthographers will excuse the spelling of this word on the ground that "business" spelt with an *i* does not express my meaning. The pure reason of

this is easily explained. In former times, the English merchant was the busiest man of the community. Your lawyer had so little to do beyond getting people imprisoned for debt, that it was all he could do to make a continual day's work of his profession. Your doctor, having only to draw so much blood from his patient, and trust in Providence, instead of administering elaborate decoctions and using refined instruments of torture, and trusting to chance—as they do now—soon disposed of what cases he had. Your soldier simply drank, swore, and fought like the deuce. Your member of Parliament—well, I really do not know what those august gentlemen had to do, except it were to listen occasionally to the orators of the day, vote according to their conscience or their money, and back game cocks and prize-fighters.

But a merchant and trader in those days got up at an unconscionably early hour of the morning and worked hard all day, taking his meals hurriedly as best he could, and returning home late in the evening to go to bed again. You see it is such hard work to be honest in trade. *Ergo*, commerce was, *par excellence*, the busy occupation, and came to be called simply “business.”

Those good old times! Now we have *changé tout ça*. Your man of business is one of the idlest fellows in the world. He lounges down to the city about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, lounges into one or two city clubs or coffee houses or whatever they are called, takes an hour or so over his lunch (as he calls that sumptuous meal), plays a game of billiards, lounges into one or two offices, then takes a hansom and drives westward about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, and finishes up the day by flirting about one or two clubs, or by flirting about one or two music halls, or by flirting about St. John's Wood or Pimlico, or some such places. At least this was Baron Rosen-
cranz's system of "business;" only add a continual attendance at meetings of hybrid Companies, and deduct billiards and every one will admit that he is a model for his generation.

Why is this? I know not, unless it is because we are cleverer—eh? smarter is the better word—than our ancestors. Wherefore, to conclude a somewhat long-winded apology for spelling, I say General Bagrathion was a man of *busyness* with a *y*. Wherever he went crowds came to see him on business; men and women, young and old, rich and poor—people of all sorts and of all kinds of occupations. For the

General, besides his secret enterprises, has a quantity of correspondence with Government men, and with bankers, and with stockbrokers. Look at the people standing and sitting in the ante-room with Peter. There is Baron Rosen-
craz himself, patiently drumming with his fingers on the table; there is positively a *prima donna* of the opera with a modest black shawl over her shoulders; there is an attaché and an English officer as well. They all have to wait their turn, that is the General's rule, their names being successively entered in a book by a quiet-looking youth who sits at the desk busily writing, a young Pole or German or something, who knows a language or two and writes shorthand. He is the General's secretary, and is much trusted by his master because he is a quiet unpretending young man who knows nobody and never says anything. All the same he may be a quiet sort of parrot that thinks, and may have strange ideas in his head, of which his master knows nothing. For the rest he is a lanky youth with brown eyes and a long nose and is called Willaume.

Presently this secretary ushers Baron Rosen-
craz into the General's sanctum.

The General is writing at his desk and extends his left hand to his visitor, while he continues his

occupation with his right, saying, "Bon jour, Baron."

"Any news?" asks Rosencranz.

"Not much," replies the General—still writing. "About the loan—you have taken some of it up, eh?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"A million."

"Get rid of them gradually."

"Et pourquoi?"

"Things are still shaky in the East. Poland is in a dangerous state. If the ringleaders are not caught there'll be an insurrection." The General is somewhat laconic in his utterance; he has not time to make speeches or be particular about grammar.

"Sp!"—uttered the Baron drawing in his breath, "I am afraid I shall lose money by it."

"No harm's done at present," replied Bagrathion. "Don't hold too many of the bonds, and when you've got to lower Russians I'll give you warning. Keep the market on a see-saw, you can sell ten thousand of mine:" ringing a hand-bell, Willaume appears. "Get my foreign book."

Willaume brings in a sort of ledger. "Russians," says the General, and the secretary turns

over the leaves of the book till he finds the place, then gives the book to Bagrathion.

"Yes," continues the General, examining the account, "sell about half the fives and the rest four-and-halves—and, look here, put them into Dairas."

"Dairas?" repeats the Baron, rather surprised.

"Yes, there's some financial scheme going on there, I hear. Buy quietly and sell at a slight rise. I will tell you when to sell mine."

"*Very* good," says the banker.

"Any fresh business?" asks the other.

"No, ver-ry dull. Shall you come down to Ladywell?"

"Most likely."

"We can talk over things there, eh? when they have got more settled, for good or bad."

"Yes."

"Good morning."

"Good morning." Exit the banker.

Countess Woronzow's man is announced.

"Une lettre, Monsieur le général."

General Bagrathion took the letter and read it, while Peter stood by with eyes cast *down*, watching him. The General frowned and then smiled—then looked up at Peter. "Very good. Madame la Comtesse is quite well?" said he.

“Quite well, General.”

“One moment. I will acknowledge receipt of this,” and Bagrathion snatched up a piece of note-paper, and scrawled off a letter to this effect:—

“MY DEAR COUNTESS,

“I have received your letter, for which I thank you most sincerely.

“I will wait patiently for you, and in silence.

“Yours devotedly,

“IVAN BAGRATHION.”

“*Voilà*, Peter.” Peter took the note and departed.

General Bagrathion leant back in his arm-chair and began reading the letter over again carefully, but the inexorable Willaume appeared at the door and announced “Mademoiselle Dash.”

The General quickly folded the letter, and, putting it in his breast-pocket, rose to receive his visitor. He was himself again. But later in the day, when he had rubbed off the roughest part of his day’s “busyness,” and was dining *tête-à-tête* with the unpretending Willaume, he studied his letter while he munched his *fillet de bœuf aux olives*.

“We must wait—hem! she has not made up

her mind yet. If so and so, I will accept your proposition. Which proposition? Why, *mine*. She means to see how I go on. She has no objection to me, but she has not made up her mind yet. She is in the dubious condition of a woman that would and yet would not. Well, well, I will settle it for her—she is mine already!” Such was the gist of the General’s cogitations on perusing Madame Woronzow’s letter.

Oh, *vanitas vanitatum*! the vanity of men. A woman has only to say she does not object to you, and you believe she loves you; that she likes you, and you think she is seized with a violent passion for you; that she loves you, and you fancy, you dream, poor wretch, that she loves only you in the whole world; that you are the world, the universe, god to her! Verily and indeed man is a vain creature, that fondly imagines all sorts of things that have no reality.

Men and women, they are all alike.

What commonplace, what fearfully dull and unamusing people we should all be without vanity!

CHAPTER XVIII.

REPULSE OF GENERAL BAGRATHION.

THE London season is over—"thank Heaven!" cry the votaries of pleasure—and the chosen people of the world, like those of old, are making their annual exodus from this land of Egypt, with its Pharaohs, and its Josephs, and its Potiphars' wives. The parallel is so far complete that many of the modern Israelites have borrowed, and are carrying away with them, "jewels of gold and jewels of silver and raiment," for which they have paid nothing. For this year, at least, there is an end of those packed ball-rooms, those stupid concerts, those silly flower shows, those same old operas, those confounded flirtations, which, carried on under difficulties in the midst of heat and dust and confusion, never do come to anything; and, lastly, there is an end of those horrid dinners which can only be promoted by the doctors for professional purposes. Soon the Egyptians themselves will follow after the Israelites, and

be swallowed up at Margate, and Ramsgate, and Brighton.

The exodus this year, however, is gradual, and numbers still linger on.

If Baroness Rosencranz has deserted her spouse and gone to Ladywell, Countess Woronzow still resides at Rose Lodge.

If Lord Uttoxeter is temporarily yachting at the Isle of Wight with Mrs Guinness Price and others, General Bagrathion is still busy in London; and, besides, our friends the Goldings have not yet made up their minds where to go to.

Before the season had come to an end, however, one or two events had occurred which must be recorded in our history.

The letters which have been shown in the previous chapter were all written, it must be understood, previous to the garden party at Rose Lodge.

Bagrathion, as we have seen, was present at the party, in fact was one of the principal guests there—and after the party he found time to leave his card at the Countess's house.

But, this duty performed, he considered that he was entitled to call on the Countess about his own special affairs, and about a week after that event he made his appearance in Yorkshire

Terrace, and had the honour of being shown into the Countess's boudoir, and also had the pleasure of seeing the Countess (his Countess as he called her to himself) in one of the most charming of morning toilettes, consisting of a pure white muslin dress cut square at the throat for the sake of coolness, so that one of the purest coloured throats in the world was exhibited to the General's view.

The Countess was reclining on the sofa, apparently in a mood the most indolent; her eyelids seemed too lazy to lift themselves, and her arm too languid almost to waft herself with a light and artistically painted fan.

The General having run up the stairs quickly, or at least having appeared to Peter to have done so on account of his comparatively little legs being obliged to work hard to get his big body along—I say, the General having mounted the stairs and arrived by forced marches into the room with the air of a commander already assured of his victory, was forced to reconnoitre his position and deploy his forces before the strongly defensive attitude of the enemy. For the room was so still, there was a sort of feeling of compressed air about it, and that fan—that fan, somehow, made the General feel as if he were facing one of those dangerous implements

of war called mitrailleuses. The soft white hand, that felt warm to the General even through his kid gloves, slipped from his grasp as soon as he had taken it, not to be retained.

So the General, having reconnoitred the position, drew a chair to the side of the sofa, deposited his hat on the floor, and leaned forward to begin the attack. He hoped the Countess had quite recovered from the fatigues of her large party. Well, really, she still felt the effects of it; it was almost too much for her to manage. General Bagrathion declared that it was one of the most successful affairs of the season; he had heard so many encomiums passed upon it. The Countess was glad to hear it, but success always cost a great deal of labour. When she said this the General was minded to allude to his own case, but he felt that the position was still too strong to attack in force, he must enfilade it a little more. Instead, he made one of those strokes of strategy which proved that he had a natural genius for the terrible art of war.

“By the bye, about that young Count (the fan moved slowly to and fro, the eyelids were slightly raised—both movements were noticed by the tactician) whom you introduced to me. Do you want me to do anything for him?”

“Oh no, he wished to know you, that was all.”

“He is old Jagellon’s son, is not he?”

“Yes.”

“I thought he wanted to be employed with us.”

“I do not think he would be of much use. Such men may be useful in the full tide of success; they throw a certain amount of *éclat* over successful enterprises. But for my part I do not believe in the *jeunesse dorée* in dangers and difficulties.”

“Nor I. But his name might be useful.”

“Some time, but not now.”

“Then you do not wish me to do anything for him?”

“Not yet.”

“He wants to have some fighting, I can see, and I think I might employ him then—*when* the real fighting begins. I wonder when we shall be able to fight it out, man to man? Upon my honour, Countess, it is weary work waiting for that time.”

“Is it?” she answered, laying her fan on her knee and looking at him with a smile almost tender. “Perhaps you will not have to wait much longer. Who knows? We may be nearing the end of the long lane. A little more patience and we shall be there.”

“I hope so,” he replied. “Before Heaven, I wish it would come to an open fight, then I shall be myself again; but I am little use in these secret intrigues and underhand workings. Without you, I should have given way long ago; there would have been a fiasco, and we should have been the horror, or the laughing-stock of Europe.”

“Are you fishing for a compliment, *mon ami*?” she asked with a meaning glance.

“No, I mean it; were you to leave us, we should do nothing.”

“I shall never leave you, General.”

“As long as you lead I shall follow.” Her hand was within his reach and he managed to seize it. “By this hand I swear it.” Now for the main attack: form companies—forward—quick march!

“Swear by something better,” she said.

“There is nothing better. This hand is the goal of my ambition—this, or a soldier’s death, will be my end!”

“Your wishes are modest, certainly.”

“No matter; that is what I desire. Ah, Countess, sometimes I long for rest after all my labours, do not you?”

“I have not time to think about it; perhaps I should not be happy without anything to do.”

"But I should be happy with you. Will you promise to be mine?"

"Well," she said, looking thoughtfully out of the window, "I am not in a position to promise anything yet, you must remember. Given certain circumstances, I will——"

"What circumstances?"

"Well, if I ever regain my liberty I will promise."

"And must I be content with that?"

"Why, what more can I say," she said, looking at him enquiringly.

"Say that I am not indifferent to you. Say that if you were free you would marry me, and I will work night and day to set you free."

"Surely you are not going to make away with poor Woronzow," she said, slowly drawling out the words.

"No, but it must come to pass in the end, I tell you. Promise me you will be mine then." So saying, the General moved his position and sat on the sofa by her side. "Promise me."

"Very well," she said quietly.

"Give me one proof that you mean it."

The General's left arm insinuated itself between the soft cushion and her waist, the General's right hand squeezed her hand, and he

brought his face near to hers, to kiss her. But she snatched her hand from his, and she dropped her fan on to the sofa. She took him by the shoulders, and, using her whole strength all at once, she lifted him clean off the sofa and set him on to the chair. Then she lay back again on the cushions and fanned herself, and fetching one deep breath of relief she said—

“Now, General, let us have fair play, or I shall really have to ring that bell there, and my maid, who is in the next room, will be here directly.”

The General was taken by surprise; for an instant he meditated another and fiercer attack, but she was lying there so calmly, fanning herself the while and breathing regularly. She forced herself to be calm, though every nerve was tingling with excitement, perhaps resentment, and her heart was beating fast. The General, in common parlance, *funked* it; he did not know what she might not do next, so he contented himself with muttering, “By Heaven, you are adorable!”

“I am pleased to hear you say so,” she replied languidly. “And now to business. Let us understand one another clearly. If I should ever *happen* to be free I will be your wife; till then, and for the present, you are and must act

as my friend, and nothing more. Do you agree?"

"Supposing I do not agree?"

"Then my promise is null and void. *Voilà tout!*"

The General was silent for a moment; he looked at her and she at him, like a lioness and a tiger calculating each other's strength.

Then he said, "I will give you my word, will you give me yours?"

"You may trust me," she answered, somewhat haughtily.

Bagrathion rose and held out his hand, and she gave him hers.

"Good-bye for the present, then." He raised her hand and kissed it adroitly. "Ah!" he said, having gained this much, "you shall be mine yet."

"Perhaps," she said, laughing, "if you are good."

And the General, defeated but not disgraced, retreated with all his forces.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. GOLDING'S PARTY.

MADAME DE WORONZOW told Lucy the result of her interview with Jagellon, namely, that he would not in all probability leave England, at least not for the present. This was so far good news, but Madame de Woronzow's silence on any further intentions of Jagellon's was ominous. She could give no reason for his intended travels beyond what he had himself given to Lucy; she was reticent as to what had passed between her and Jagellon; she spoke coldly of him, and in fact alluded to the subject in an indifferent tone. She said, "Oh, he will not leave England yet," as if it was a matter of no moment whether he did so or not. Lucy's timid heart took alarm at these ominous symptoms of Theodora's displeasure with him; she pondered over and over again upon the subject. How could he have offended her? Then she remembered the tone almost of animosity with which he had spoken to her about the Countess; the latter had

offended him in the first place, and, Lucy thought, she evidently did not know how, because she had said that she had said nothing to him at which he could take offence. Then, Lucy argued, he must have spoken too frankly to the Countess and offended her.

This was the result of Lucy's many cogitations on the subject, and she fretted and worried herself about it day by day. If her two dearest friends misunderstood one another, what should she do? How could she keep both when they were separated? and what bitterness it would be to part with either. Already she seemed to be parted from one. Theodora was still as loving as ever. Whatever the misunderstanding might be it did not affect their friendship. She had asked the Countess (at Mrs. Hatton's instigation) if she would come to their party, to which Theodora had replied, "If you will ask me, I will come wherever you like;" so gravely and tenderly, that Lucy had squeezed her hand in reply, and said she would so like her to be there if she did not mind. "Then you must ask Mrs. Golding to be so good as to send me an invitation." And so it was settled, Lucy declaring that she was the best Theodora that ever lived, and hastening home to tell her mother and Barbara, who, with unfeigned joy,

wrote the card of invitation, and contrived to inform some of her friends that Countess Woronzow would be there.

It was only natural that Count Jagellon should be asked, as Mrs. Hatton suggested, to meet the Countess, and the Count had promptly accepted the invitation in a note scrawled on rough note paper, with his crest at the top of the sheet. The note was simply this:—

July 12.

“DEAR MRS. GOLDING,—

“I have much pleasure in accepting your invitation for the 20th.

“Yours sincerely,

“JAGELLON.”

An ugly scrawl, which Lucy contrived to seize and carry off to her secret drawer, to be contemplated from time to time.

Anxiously did she wait now for the day to arrive when she would see him again, when she hoped to clear up the misunderstanding that was fretting her. She had not seen him since that meeting in the harbour at Theodora's party. There had been no more riding together in Rotten Row; she had been once to the opera, but he was not there; she had driven past his club, and had not caught a glimpse of him. He

seemed to have disappeared altogether. He was in London, certainly, for there was his reply to the invitation, and she had contrived to obtain from Gus that he had met Jagellon.

It was dull and dreary waiting for the day of the party, and she could only think and think of him and what she should say to him, and how she could bring him and the Countess together again.

She was no longer the bright Lucy of the past few weeks; her father noticed it. One evening the family had been sitting together silently, except for Mrs. Hatton's occasional remarks on the coming ball, and eternal calculations of how many ladies and how many gentlemen, and how many titles, and how many old ladies, and how many young ones there would be, and how many bottles of wine would be necessary, and how many ices, and how many everything else. So Mr. Golding cut into her desultory conversation by addressing Lucy—

“Well, Lucy, when shall you have done thinking about the whole affair?”

And Lucy, starting and blushing, said she did not know she was thinking about it.

To which papa replied, “I suppose it is the new dress—eh? Isn't it settled yet how many flounces and how many ribbons it's to have?”

"Oh, I was not thinking of that exactly, papa."

"Oh, not exactly. I wonder how much it's to cost, this wonderful dress? A hundred pounds, I'll be bound."

"Oh *no*, papa."

"I do not think it will be more than twenty-five, dear," put in Mrs. Golding mildly, not looking up from her crochet work.

"Twenty-five pounds! Well, well, what would people say if *I* was to spend twenty-five pounds over a coat—eh, Mrs. Barbara?"

"Ah, you have to spend money in a different way, that is all," replied the practical Barbara, also not looking up from her replies to the invitations.

"My dress things cost me six pounds," remarked Mr. Hatton, laying down the *Contemporary Review*, which he was steadily and perseveringly perusing.

The six pounds were almost thrown away, for Mr. Hatton's coats never fitted him—at least, when he was standing up; they were simply flat bags on his back, and his back always looked the true back of a husband thoroughly well married. After this remark of Mr. Hatton's the conversation took a practical turn, and Lucy was again left to the company of her own

thoughts. But her mother noted all these things while she was busy with her work. What thing ever does escape the watchful eye of a mother that concerns her own children, especially if she loves them—which is often the case? She had noticed that Lucy was often *distracte*, listless; and she had noted the fact that Gus came less frequently to their house, and that when he came he was polite and constrained with Lucy, not on the easy terms with her that he used to be. All these things the maternal mind thought over in silence, not daring yet to confide them to her husband's ear.

Such was the state of affairs in Park House, when the day of the ball at length arrived. How the greater part of that day passed Lucy at least did not know, the whole house was in such a bustle while the finishing touches were put on the rooms, while the rout seats were arranged, the flowers and plants placed on the landing at the top of the stairs and in the hall, the supper room laid out (under Mrs. Hatton's special superintendence), and the awnings placed in front of the entrance and over the balconies, so that one could gain a breath of fresh air without being seen from the road.

The family, reinforced by one or two uncles, aunts, and cousins, dined at six o'clock on that

day, the ladies, except Mrs. Golding, being absent dressing; and by half-past nine they were assembled in the front drawing-room ready to receive their guests. Mr. Golding, clean, correct, and well-shaved; his wife in dark grey silk dress, trimmed with white lace; Mrs. Hatton in mauve, with a capacious train of solid silk, if I may so call it; her husband with stiff upright collar, and bad-fitting coat; and lastly, but not of the least, Lucy, the belle of the ball, in white tarlatan, trimmed with the lightest Cambridge blue, low body, and train gathered up with bunches of forget-me-nots, and in her flaxen hair, simply done up in plaits, a camellia.

In a very short time the respectably punctual friends of the family began to arrive; by ten o'clock they were arriving fast, and in about half an hour after dancing began in the other drawing-room.

I should mention, for the benefit of those who do not know Park House, that there are two separate drawing-rooms, one facing the Park and the other at the back; between the two, at the top of the stairs leading from the hall, there is a spacious landing, and you go into each drawing-room up two steps, the doors facing one another. The morning-room, next the library (facing the Park), was used for cloak-room, the

library for cards, and in the dining-room were meats and drinks. It is only due to Mrs. Hatton to say that all the arrangements were carried out perfectly.

The front drawing-room was for music and conversation, the back drawing-room was the ball-room proper, where there was a not over-loud band to keep the "twinkling feet" going.

In the ball-room were generally Mr. and Mrs. Hatton and Lucy, conducting the proceedings, and, as we have little to do with the dancing, I had better describe the people there at once, as I suppose I must do so, for the sake of those happy people who have never been to a respectably correct ball of the *haute bourgeoisie*.

First of all, the ladies. What fine, tall, handsome girls you see there, blondes and brunettes, with clear complexions and eyes, and well-formed features; these are the sisters of the athletes of our land. It is a curious thing that so few of their brothers are there; evidently so, for the gentlemen on the whole are not such fine creatures as the ladies. They all dance very well, nearly all; there are always one or two deplorable male exceptions, but let them pass; their duty is to keep the hopeless virgins in tow. The girls have an air of modesty—No, that is not quite the word; they have no

maiden bashfulness ; there are no timid, down-cast eyes ; they look at you boldly, without fear and without reserve. Not modesty—innocence, is it ? Well, not exactly that ; one instinctively feels they know a great deal of what one would scarcely expect them to know. Supposing you were to mention Mrs. Guinness Price's name, for instance, you would find they one and all had heard of her, and of Lord Uttoxeter as well. You must not mention particulars, or you will find the subject cut short with a cool remark and a cutting stare. The fastest girl there only talks perpetually about hunting—a subject which may grow monotonous.

No, I think I can best express the *ton* of these fine young maidens by saying that they all seem confident in their own strict virtue ; they are evidently quite immaculate, and they know it, and they will let *you* know it if you are too dull to see it at a glance. These are the young plants that grow into a full-blown British matron.

We have heard *ad nauseam* of the Babylonian Marriage Market, which was at best a very silly idea, and we have a much better system in vogue now, the exact reverse of the Oriental one. For, first of all, the naughty young men are put up to auction—the richest and naughtiest ; and when these have all been disposed of, then the

virtuous ones are bid for, until the poorest and most strictly moral young man has been procured for a small sum of beauty.

And now let me introduce you to the future husbands of these future matrons ; they are all well-educated gentlemen, as you may tell by their decided way of pronouncing their *h*'s. If they are not all handsome, they have cheerful countenances and bright eyes ; they are contented and happy ; they have at least enough to live on comfortably. They all seem to have an earnest—a really earnest—belief that they are correct and righteous, and that everything else is correct and righteous, and they would be ready to denounce any wrong, if they could only see it, which they cannot do unless they are wronged themselves ; and then, indeed, they exclaim loudly against the injustice, and write to the *Times* or the *Standard*. To sum up, they admire the British Constitution, and especially the British Aristocracy, of which they consider themselves members.

Lucy, tripping round there in the grand chain of the Lancers, looks timidly at one after the other of those smiling cheerful faces, and thinks how different they look to one face she knows, with moustache defiantly curled up, and with its reckless-looking brown eyes, and she

thinks how strange he would look amongst these cheerful and correct young gentlemen and ladies.

Ah! when will he arrive? Poor Lucy! the ball-room is somewhat monotonous. Let us leave it.

Here, in the other drawing-room, there is a murmur, and a movement, a buzz of voices that almost subdues the warbling of a lady of dubious age, save one reckless B. The fine old ladies put their gold-rimmed eye-glasses on their respectable noses, the rich old gentlemen turn round to stare and exclaim, "Is that her?" "Ah, that's the Countess!" "It's Countess Woronzow," as she makes her way slowly into the room—a damask rose in her dark hair, and a *Gloire de Dijon* in her splendid dress. She knows scarcely anybody there; she speaks to none till Mrs. Golding comes up.

"Where is Lucy?" she asks, looking round after greeting her hostess.

"She is dancing in the ball-room; she will be so glad you have come." Then, turning to Mr. Golding, who had come up, she said simply, "This is my husband, Madame."

He makes a stately bow, does the honest old gentleman, but she holds out her hand. "We are old acquaintances," she says; "I know you

well by reputation, Mr. Golding ; and what a charming house this is of yours, it does look well ! ”

“ Madame,” says he, “ I am proud of the honour you have done it.” Then he offers her his arm and leads her up the room, to a seat on an ottoman. Then the introductions begin, and as if by magic the Countess is surrounded by about five million pounds worth of old gentlemen, complimenting her to the best of their abilities. Presently Mrs. Hatton comes in, bringing her husband with her to be introduced. “ How very kind of the Countess to come ! it is quite an event for them ! ” says frankly Mrs. Hatton ; and so say all the rest. And presently Lucy comes in, radiantly blushing with pleasure, having coolly left her partner in the middle of a polka to see Countess Woronzow, as she says—comes up smiling and blushing, and shyly tries to make her way up to Theodora, when Theodora sees her and gets up, saying, “ Ah, there’s Lucy ! ” and takes her two hands and kisses her. “ How charming you look, dear ! ” she says ; and one old gentleman—Mr. Hatton’s senior partner, in fact, worth about a million of money or so—has the presence of mind to say with a bow, “ Madame, allow me to present you to *one* of the belles of the ball,” and is rewarded with

a smile from Madame, while Lucy blushes still more till she is led to a seat by Theodora.

"I am so glad to see you," she whispers; "it is so good of you to come."

"I have come to see *you* darling," says the other, and so they sit side by side, the centre of attraction for this little world.

It would be tedious to recount all the incidents of the party, and it must suffice to relate how one earnest young man, hailing probably from that country which is expressed by the letters N.B. (which also stand for "No Bashfulness"), and anxious to do what was right, asked the Countess to dance, and was refused with thanks, and how he was finally suppressed by Gus coming up and offering to take Madame round the place; how she made him take Lucy, and herself went with Mr. Golding, followed by a train of admirers; and how she pledged her host in a glass of select champagne, which old Robert had procured in the nick of time (for which he was afterwards highly commended by his master).

What I have to relate specially is that the Countess, declaring she would leave the gentlemen to it, went out of the supper room with Lucy.

"Do you want to say anything to me?" said Madame, as soon as they were in the hall.

"Yes, for one moment; come up to my boudoir. I want to show it to you."

They went upstairs, passed the drawing-rooms, the Countess rejecting all offers of assistance by saying she was going to view Miss Golding's boudoir, and entered the little room which we have already partially seen, and which cannot be further revealed. What passed between them I will relate so far as I know. Lucy began by saying—

"Theodora, he has not come."

"Who, darling?" asked Theodora. "Not——"

"Yes."

"You never told me he was to be here."

"I dare not; I thought he had offended you. Forgive me. I hoped to reconcile you. I am very unhappy," and she burst into tears.

"You have made a mistake," said Theodora in reply; "I could have told you that he would not come."

"Why not?" asked Lucy.

"Because he does not care to come here; he is not suited to this society, and he would not come without a motive."

"He does not care for me, you mean?" Lucy said inquiringly.

"Lucy," said Theodora, "listen to me. I asked him to leave his present life and settle down

into a sober gentleman. He would not. And I told him I would have nothing to do with him until he reformed himself."

"Perhaps I could make him better," pleaded Lucy.

"You could, but he must begin himself; at present he is not fit for you. Lucy, my darling," the Countess added, "you must make up your mind to give him up."

"Oh! Theodora," said Lucy.

"Yes. If he is really worthy of you, he will love you, I am certain; he is not worthy of you now; he may be, and I hope and pray he will."

And that is all I know of what passed between them.

When they came back into the rooms, Mrs. Golding's watchful eyes saw that Lucy had been crying, notwithstanding Madame Woronzow's endeavours to conceal the fact.

The Countess left soon after, to the regret of every one, it being then about one o'clock, and for nearly three more hours Lucy had to continue the dancing and talking. She scarcely knew what she said; she whirled round in the waltzes unconsciously; she walked mechanically through the quadrille. All the laughing, and talking, and dancing, and flirting, and eating, and drink-

ing seemed to her a sort of nightmare, quite meaningless, quite grotesque — but horrible. She could not escape, she must bear it as best she could, and she did bear it.

The hours stole on, the delicate dawn peeped through the windows, the music died away, and *he* never appeared. The earnest young men and the fine ladies were driven away one after another with merry laughter, with little innocent jests ; and the old ladies nestled themselves in their carriages, and the old gentlemen shook hands for the last time with their host and hostess—they had never enjoyed themselves so much. It was nearly over, and *he* had not come. The last carriage had gone, the front door was closed, and the bolts were shot into their sockets with a bang by Robert ; the uncles and aunts and cousins went to bed slowly, one or two leaning over the banisters to give a last message for the morning, or repeat for the last time a joke of the night. And Lucy at last went upstairs to be alone and to think—

“The lee lang night, and weep, my dear,
The lee lang night and weep.”

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. HATTON DOES SOMETHING.

YOUR practical people as a rule are not particularly farsighted ; they act promptly as soon as they see what they have to do, but somebody else must open their eyes.

Wherefore Lucy's matrimonial affairs took some time before they reached the intelligence of Mrs. Hatton, when something practical was done by the family on her account. First of all, as we have seen, Mrs. Golding suspected that all was not going well with her daughter. After a lapse of time—if we must be particular as to dates, it was very soon after the ball at Park House — Mrs. Golding told her doubts and anxieties to her husband. Mr. Golding took a day to consider and examine into the matter, and then decided that his wife was right, and that Barbara ought to be consulted. And the following day Barbara was consulted.

At first she pooh-poohed the idea.

“So I did myself,” said her father; “but

when I came to notice Lucy, I thought she did not seem quite happy ; that is the point that convinced me. I think he is *crying off*."

"Why should he?" asked the practical Barbara.

That was just the difficulty. Why should Gus wish to break his engagement? what better match could he have? However, Barbara said she would look into it—she would do something. And she went to work at once, that is the very next day after the conversation with her father.

Practical people always go straight to the point; they abhor the tedious process of *finesse*. So did Mrs. Hatton. She contrived to get Lucy to herself in the latter's room, and proceeded to "tackle" her.

"Lucy," said she, "now I have got an opportunity, I should like to talk to you about your marriage."

Lucy, who was idling over one of Miss Broughton's novels, stopped reading at this proposition, though she continued to look at the book.

"Yes?" she said.

"Have you and Gus settled anything between you?" Barbara asked, plying her wool-work the while.

“N—no.”

“Because, dear, something ought to be definitively arranged about it.”

“I thought papa and mamma were going to settle about it,” suggested Lucy, turning over the leaves of her book.

“Yes, but we should like to know what you both think about it.”

“I don’t know, I am sure. Had you not better talk it over with Gus?”

“We will. But,” proceeded Barbara, “papa and mamma want to be quite sure that you are still of the same mind. Is it so?”

“Yes” (almost in a whisper).

“And you have no reason to doubt that Gus wishes it as well?”

Here Barbara looked up from her work, and Lucy from her book.

“I—I believe so.”

“Has he said anything to you?” (a pause).

“He asked me about it one day. I told him I had no wish to—to break it, and I understood that he wished it—that he—that is——”

“He still likes you as well as ever?”

“Yes” (in a semi-dubious tone).

“Lucy, I will be frank with you. Mamma and papa think he has not been so frequent lately in his addresses to you.”

Lucy had not noticed it, which was true. Would she be able to tell the truth in answer to the next question, supposing it should be asked whether she was of the same mind towards Gus?

“You do not think he looks coldly on the match—that, in fact, he prefers any one else?”

Lucy was so taken aback by this suggestion that she answered quickly—

“Oh, no!” and then thinking she might not after all know everything about it, added, in a very dubious tone—“Not that I know of.” Which double answer fairly posed Barbara, leaving her with a decided impression that something *was* wrong with Mr. Fipps. She contented herself with saying—

“Very well, dear. I am glad you have spoken so openly, and I will, if you like, arrange the matter for you.”

“Yes,” said Lucy, returning (in fear and trembling) to her book.

And so the matter thus far ended.

“There *is* something amiss, you may depend upon it,” said Mrs. Hatton to her father and mother in the private consultation which ensued after her talk with Lucy. “I will go and see him to-morrow,” she added.

“Do you think that would be best?” sug-

gested Mrs. Golding. "Had we not better try and find out some other way of getting at the truth?"

"No, I will get it out of him. Better to learn the whole truth and break off the match at once, than for Lucy to be married to a man who does not care for her."

To this both the others assented, and so Mrs. Hatton took the brougham on the following day and drove to Mr. Fipps's rooms.

I am aware that this seems rather a rash proceeding on the part of a well-bred lady like Mrs. Hatton, and no doubt five ladies out of every ten would not do such a thing now-a-days, but the fact remains that she did beard Mr. Gus in his den, as we shall presently see.

For the rest, there was not very much imprudence in the action. Mrs. Hatton was not—— Well, you must know that Mrs. Golding was in her day quite a belle, and it was considered at the time rather a poor match for her when she accepted Mr. Golding, who was then merely the nephew of a partner in the bank. And Barbara was like her father in appearance; Lucy, as I have said before, was like her mother. That was the difference.

Our friend Gus, at the moment of Mrs. Hatton's arrival, was sitting in his chair dreaming,

with a volume of Byron on his knee, which he had ceased to read. The fact is that Gus had gone in for "bettering himself," and as a means to that end had begun reading various volumes of standard literature. Jagellon had a story which he told in the club with great effect, about coming in one day and discovering Gus fast asleep over Cicero, and of his apologetically remarking when he awoke, that he was trying to rub up his Latin a bit. The notion of Gus going in for literature tickled his club friends immensely. Next to a statesman writing a comic novel they voted that Gus as a literary man would be most ludicrous.

Gus was on this occasion brought back to the realities of life (which he had been trying hard to dispense with in his daydreams) by his old woman—as he familiarly called the prim female to whom he paid rent—by his old woman, I say, announcing, to his astonishment, the advent of Mrs. Hatton.

Gus, being attired in a greenish-brown coloured coat, felt that his appearance was scarcely befitting the presence of a real lady, and he was somewhat awkward in consequence. Mrs. Hatton, however, bustled into the room with a whistle of her silk dress against the door, saying—

“I am sorry to disturb you, Mr. Fipps, at this time of the day” (it was about half-past one), “but I wanted to see you on business, and I thought I should find you disengaged at this hour.”

“Always at your service, Mrs. Hatton,” replied Gus, wheeling an arm-chair towards her. “Please excuse my *déshabille*.”

“Oh, never mind that.” Then she settled herself in her chair, folded one gloved hand over the other, leant forwards, and threw back her head—the attitude, in fact, that ladies assume in church when they want every one to think that they are going to listen very attentively to the sermon which is about to be preached. “I want to know, Mr. Fipps, what are your ideas about your marriage; we think something ought to be definitely settled about it.”

Now I think I have mentioned that the Hon. Mr. Fipps was a member of the diplomatic service, and it is only due to that service to say that it generally endues its servants with a certain aplomb and presence of mind which go far to replace qualities of much more value, such as foresight and common sense. The qualities above mentioned were of considerable service to Gus on this occasion. He assumed an appearance of well-bred ennui, sufficient to con-

ceal the annoyance and perplexity which he felt at the question of his marriage being propounded.

“ Well, you see, ” he said, after carefully considering his right boot of patent leather and delicate kid, “ ’pon my word, I don’t know what to do about it. Nothing is settled yet about myself, you know.”

“ We understood that you would be appointed in October,” remarked Mrs. Hatton.

“ I know,” replied Gus, “ but it is not even settled whether I am to go to St. Petersburg at all. I asked Lord X—— himself about it the other day, and he said, ‘ My dear fellow, the question is now, shall we send you there or not? you are a conciliatory man, you know,’ said he, ‘ and the question is, do we want a conciliatory man there.’ That was what he said; of course it may be all Lord X.’s mysterious bosh, but it is evident they have not finally settled where I am to go.”

“ Then do you wish to postpone the match?” inquired Mrs. Hatton.

Gus upon this leant back in his chair and nursed his right leg.

“ Well, I thought Lucy, and the rest of you, were to decide that question. That was what the governor arranged with Mr. Golding, was it not?”

"Yes, but we should like to know, before deciding, what is your wish."

"'Pon my honour, my wish is just Lucy's wish, and what will best suit your convenience."

Mrs. Hatton thought this young diplomatist was prevaricating, so she determined to address a home question to him.

"Allow me to ask you one thing," she said. "You still wish to keep to your engagement?"

"Certainly, why not?"

"Because, excuse my frankness, we thought that you were—well, less frequent in your attentions to her—that there might be something between you. And I may say that Mr. Golding thinks that the engagement should cease at once if there is any disagreement between you, rather than that you should be married under what he would consider a disadvantage to Lucy."

Gus heard her to the end of her ultimatum, looking her full in the face; when she had finished he began fingering the gold solitaire on his wristband, and spoke as follows:—

"My dear Mrs. Hatton, it seems to me that two engaged people are so far married that they are only accountable to one another for their conduct towards each other. If I thought that

Miss Golding desired to see me every day, I should see her every day, however *ennuyeux* it might be to the rest of you. I am not aware," Gus went on to say, "that I have been remiss in my attentions——"

"I did not say that," put in Mrs. Hatton.

"A—less frequent in my attentions to Miss Golding, and if she has expressed any wish on the subject——"

"No," interrupted Mrs. Hatton again, "she has not said anything on that score; on the contrary, she told me she had not noticed any difference in your behaviour."

"Then," said Gus, leaning forward with downcast eyes, "I think there is nothing more to be said."

This was a sufficiently broad hint for Mrs. Hatton to understand that he was not going to say anything more about it. If Lucy had no complaint against him he did not care a bit; other people might say or think what they pleased.

Mrs. Hatton rose to go.

"I am sorry to have had to allude to this very delicate subject," said she, "but after your frank answer it need not be mentioned again. We must, then, decide the date between us?" she added, smiling.

“Certainly. All I ask is that whatever you decide has Lucy’s entire concurrence, you know.”

“Oh, of *course*. Well, *good* morning. Come and see us soon, and we will talk it over quietly together.”

“With pleasure,” he answered.

On Gus’s return to his room, after having seen his future sister-in-law to her carriage, he made use of the following undiplomatic expression—“The infernal old meddler!”

Then he proceeded to walk about the room while he considered the matter, and at the conclusion of that exercise he said to himself—“I will see the Countess at once about it,” and went to dress himself.

When he was properly attired he went out, hailed a hansom, and drove to Rose Lodge.

CHAPTER XXI.

TREATS OF A LOW SUBJECT.

THERE is a street which turns out of Holborn. It is not a fashionable street, for you see there no family mansions, or bijou villas, or gigantic shops. It is not a respectable street, as you may see by the mere appearance of the gin hovel—*palace* it cannot becalled—at the corner of it. It is not an immoral street; immorality is more thriving, has much better houses to live in than those which form the two sides of this street. It is not a dangerous street; any one can walk along it in mid-day, in the twilight, or even in darkness without the protection of a policeman. It is simply a street which leads out of Holborn—as Holborn is so are the adjoining streets.

Holborn is not fashionable, and yet it is fashionable—witness its Hotel, its Restaurant. Holborn is not respectable—certainly not. and yet what can we say against the respectability of the large and industrious shops it contains?

And Holborn is not immoral either ; were I to say so the street might bring its action for libel against me, and would doubtless get its case, for any body can get any case against any man who has the audacity to write what he honestly thinks.

Yet one sees queer things in Holborn ; one may see some sights, always supposing that one denudes one's eyes of the blue spectacles that one ordinarily wears. Then one may see things which, told aloud to ladies and gentlemen with a proper circumlocution of speech, would be received with the stony silence of unbelief. All I can say is, if you want to see the product of modern civilization and science—the patent article, in fact—go along Holborn assiduously with your eyes open and you will see it ;—the grand invention of modern civilization—the sole and original invention—the creature that is lower than the beasts of the field, lower than the dog that returns to its own vomit—the creature that thinks what may not be thought of, that speaks words that the fiends of poets' imagination might well envy, and that does those things which were never done except in our decrepit times.

As is Holborn so is Vulture Street, Holborn. Vulture Street with, *imprimis*, its grocery—a

term which in Vulture Street means a shop supplying a multiplicity of articles, from tea (at one shilling the pound) to mouse-traps—with its gin hovel aforementioned ; with its coal-hole or shop or warehouse, whatever it may be called ; with its ironmongery, containing principally old nails, old chisels, and old fire-grates ; with its laundry, which is not remarkable for cleanliness ; and with its coffee-house, where beds are advertised for single gentlemen, as if any *single* or *gentleman* would be likely to go there. Lastly, with its picture-frame maker, whose name is John Mentzel. To return to my story.

On a certain day in July of the year 1862, a day the like of which is not to be seen out of London, dull and fine, gloomy and clear, an east wind and no breath of air—on such a day there might have been seen (only nobody noticed him) a tall well-dressed man, with a graceful mien and a decidedly handsome countenance, walking along Holborn, apparently intent on finding some house or street in that neighbourhood. Count Jagellon—for such was his name—after examining the names of several streets on his route, turned up one which led into Vulture Street.

Arrived at that street, he soon became an object of vulture-like interest to its inhabitants.

The fat ironmonger, attired in greasy apron, stared angrily at the passer-by, probably because he did not get the opportunity of fleecing him of some sum of money, were it only a few half-pence.

The grocer, who at this slack time of business stood at his shop door, beamed on the stranger with his sallow face and sweaty nose, under the impression that the "swell" was coming to his shop. For Jagellon, being somewhat confused by the erratic arrangement of the numbers on the houses in Vulture Street, crossed over to the grocery, attracted thereto by the prominent announcement in the window—

INDIVIDUAL ENTERPRISE *v.* CO-OPERATIVE
STORES"—

in order to ascertain the number of that shop, having on his way to pick a passage through a group of diminutive children in the gutter, engaged in a diminutive imitation of the works of Sebastopol or Plevna. The number of the grocery happened—by what chance I know not—to be 35, and as the number Jagellon had last seen on the opposite side was 27, he considered that the odds were on 16 being on the other side. So he recrossed the road, much to the

disappointment of the sallow grocer, and reached the pavement, after having made another slight *détour* to avoid a dirty waggon, attached to a bony horse, and one or two black sacks full of coal, or something of the kind, that were standing without any definite purpose by the coal-hole. Jagellon's calculations proved correct, for he came unexpectedly upon No. 16, which happened—I do not know why—to be next to No. 19, and having glanced in at the contents of the window, a number of prettily carved and gilded frames, and one or two sham or real paintings and engravings, he turned the handle of the shop door and went in accompanied by the sound of a tinkling bell.

Inside the shop, surrounded as to the walls with large and small frames, was a youth engaged in tickling the tail of a white cat with a fine saw, with intent to make the tail jump; and, in fact, the said tail had got into such a ticklish state, that it continued a series of spasmodic twitches on Jagellon's entrance—while the owner thereof gazed at him with a placid smile and a wink of its pink eyes.

“Is Mr. Mentzel here?” inquired Jagellon.

“Yes, seer,” replied the youth, with an accent which corresponded with his general appearance; for his hair was cropped short, and stood up on

his head "like quills upon the fretful porcupine," and he had little sharp black eyes, and a row of white little teeth, which were seen whenever he spoke. He darted through the door at the back of the shop, through which after the lapse of a few minutes appeared Mr. Mentzel himself.

"How do you do Mr. Mentzel," said Jagellon.

"Ah!" he replied, "I am very well, I thank you. Will you be good enough to step inside," saying which he held the door open for his visitor, and Jagellon walked into the parlour, closely followed by the white cat which had been probably waiting for this event; while the foreign youth, deprived of his companion, set to work diligently carving in the shop, and stopping ever and anon, perhaps to dream the dreams of happy boyhood undisturbed by any conspiracy which might be going on around him.

Meanwhile in the parlour Jagellon and Mr. Mentzel conversed together.

"I intended to look you up before, but I have been so occupied with these confounded parties and other things that I have not really found an opportunity of coming to see you."

"You are always welcome my lord," replied Mr. Mentzel.

"And this is where you live," remarked Jagellon, looking out of the window at the fine scenery of dirty yards, beastly workshops and rickety chimneys.

"Yes, this is my home at present," answered the other.

"Why shouldn't you come and live in a better place. Come and live near me, you can get a very nice little room for little money not far from me."

"You are very good, but I live here on purpose. If I were to live in any fashionable neighbourhood, I should be amongst ladies and servants who remark things and gossip about them. Here no one notices me, and they gossip about other sorts of people. And here I am on the spot, so to speak, I am in the midst of the very people I want to study; here I can, so to speak, feel the pulse of the people, when it is in a feverish or in a sluggish state."

"I do not know that," rejoined Jagellon; "I think you can know what is going on in a nation as well in society, or better, than out of it. If society's all right, everything else will get right, I think."

"I admit what you say," said Mr. Mentzel; "but there are others who study society. I devote myself to the residuum, as it is called."

“You mean such men as General Bagrathion look after society?” inquired Jagellon. Mr. Mentzel glanced at him.

“No, I do not mean General Bagrathion,” he said shortly.

“Mr. Mentzel, I know a good deal how things go on in society; I go everywhere, you know; why should you not employ me?”

“Why should I?” asked Mr. Mentzel, with a polite smile.

“Well, I want something to do; I am sick of doing nothing, and I might be of some help.”

“My lord,” answered the other, “your reasons are not very good ones. One does not usually engage in a desperate enterprise *faute de mieux*!”

“There is absolutely *nothing* else I can do.”

“Marry!”

Jagellon looked at him quickly. “Why do you say that?” he asked.

“Why, you are Count Jagellon, you are in the best society, you have some money, is it not natural and easy for you to marry and perpetuate your good name?”

“Is that your own idea?”

“Yes, why not?”

“Never mind; look here, Mr. Mentzel, there

are two reasons against my ever marrying. First, because no lady would accept me—no suitable lady. I go to clubs and balls and parties and all that, but if you were in society you would know that no respectable mamma would entertain me as a husband for her daughter; I have neither money, nor reputation. The second reason is that I *won't* marry."

"That is certainly conclusive," remarked Mr. Mentzel, quietly. "Why not go into the army?"

"Oh, the army is a caste; it is only the sons of regular army families that go into the army and succeed there."

"Well, try business, then."

"I have had no education for it; I should only lose the little money I have, in useless labour."

There was a pause, then Mr. Mentzel said, gently—

"Well, what do you propose yourself?"

"I want to follow my natural calling, be what my father was, and my grandfather, too, I dare say."

"It will take you long to be what your father was," said the old man, sternly.

"I dare say—if he were only alive he could show me how. But as it is I am hanged if I have any one to tell me how to do it."

Mr. Mentzel looked at him keenly, and Jagellon returned his look with equal earnestness.

“Listen to me, Count. You are holding language to me which places you in my power. You are rash, young, headstrong ; all those defects must be eradicated before you can imitate your great father. You are a freeborn Englishman ; you are well in society. All those advantages you must give up ; you must be suspected, thrown out of the world, watched, hated, despised, an outcast, a criminal—do you understand?—if you attempt to join the cause of liberty.”

“I care nothing for society ; I am already hated and suspected. I shall lose nothing.”

“What is your motive for giving up your present position ? ” asked Mr. Mentzel.

“I have told you I want to do something ; I want to be what my father was.”

“But why do you wish this now—is it some sort of revenge ? ”

“Oh no.”

“I believe,” remarked the other quietly, “that there are only two motives which actuate men—the love of something, or the hatred of something.”

“I am not aware that I hate anything particularly,” said Jagellon, smiling.

"Alors, vous aimez."

Jagellon did not reply.

"Come, come, my friend," proceeded Mr. Mentzel, smiling, "You are in despair; you have missed your chance, is it not so? and you wish to do something desperate."

"No; on my honour it is not so," said Jagellon.

"Tenez. Love, Monsieur le Comte, is sometimes used as a lever in politics to remove obstacles out of the way, or to move an inert mass, if you like, but it is not the main force of statecraft. Come, I am very glad to have spoken with you, and I know you are well disposed to me and my friends, but take my advice, wait a bit and think it over quietly, and do not do anything desperate of which you will soon repent."

"Look here, Mr. Mentzel," replied Jagellon slowly, "I know a little what you are, and I suspect a good deal more. I know one or two others who are doing the same as you. Very well. Knowing this, I mean to place myself in your power, as you said. I mean to offer myself as one of you; you may reject me or not as you like, that is your lookout. I have already been introduced to General Bagrathion and I asked him openly to let me serve under him, and I think he will."

“What did he say?” asked Mentzel, sharply.

“He said that if there were any more fighting, and he said there might be, I should be in it.”

Mr. Mentzel was silent for a moment, apparently thinking about it.

“Very well; very well,” he said, “I shall see the General myself, and get to know his intentions. In the meantime I neither reject nor accept you, but I tell you to do nothing nor say anything about this.”

“Very good,” said Jagellon.

“I will consider the matter,” proceeded Mr. Mentzel. “I am not my own master, and I must act on the advice and by the command of others.”

“I understand,” said Jagellon. “In the meantime I hope you will believe that I am devoted to your interests, and that I am ready to do anything I can.”

“I do, Count. If I want any little service done that will compromise neither of us I will ask you to do it.”

“Do so, by all means.”

They rose together—but before Jagellon left the room, Mentzel said, “I think it would be better if you could take a picture or a frame, as an excuse for coming here you know.”

“Oh, I thought of that. I will send you down a couple of small water-colours I want framing—plain gilt frames, please.”

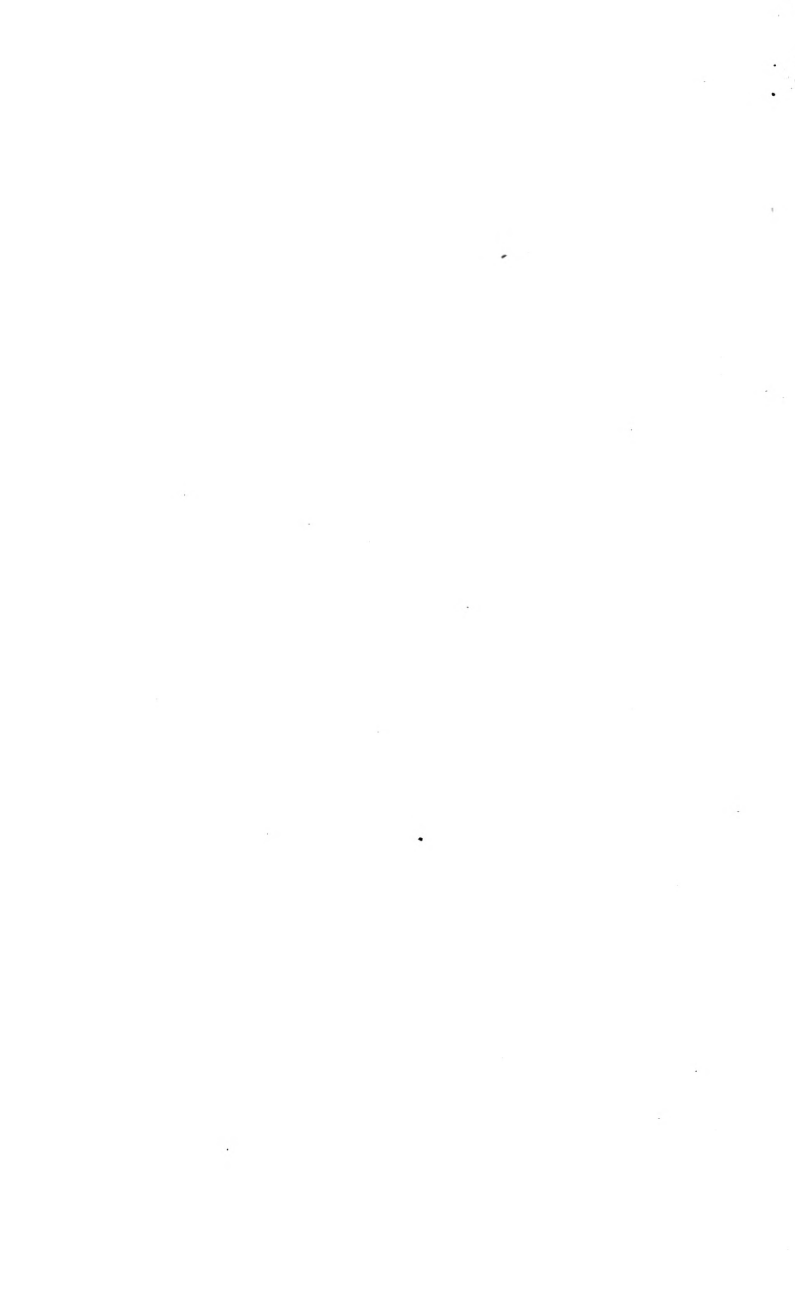
“Ah, very well, that will do. Good-day to you, my lord.”

“Good-bye,” said Jagellon, holding out his hand. “You will let me know?”

“Yes,” said the other shortly, and followed him through his shop, the door of which he opened for his visitor, and bowed him out.

And Jagellon walked down Vulture Street and along Holborn, musing as he went on what had passed between himself and his fellow-countryman.

END OF VOL. I.



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